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Stoya
As a porn actress, entrepreneur and writer for Vice and The New York Times, Stoya, who made her first PLAYBOY appearance as a star of our Renegades Issue, is no stranger to exploration. She draws on that same spirit of adventure for Expanding Your Sexual Frontiers, an exclusive guide to pushing your limits both in and out of the bedroom.

AM Homes
In She Got Away, a Minneapolis co-ed returns to LA to confront a family crisis. This original story marks Homes's PLAYBOY debut, but her relationship with us began in 1987 when she was a runner-up in our College Fiction Contest. Homes dedicated her first collection, The Safety of Objects, to renowned PLAYBOY fiction editor Alice K. Turner.

Nicholas Gurewitch
The cartoonist and frequent PLAYBOY contributor is also the brains behind the widely successful (and laugh-out-loud funny) Perry Bible Fellowship, a comic web series that juxtaposes whimsical sketches with subject matter ranging from religion to sexuality to war. This issue features an exclusive full-page cartoon by Gurewitch — happy hunting!

Tom Toro
We couldn't think of anyone better to map Trumplandia's craggy topography than longtime New Yorker cartoonist Toro. In the illustrated Travels With Toro, the artist — whose book of Trump-themed cartoons, Tiny Hands, is out now — probes the disconnect between voters on the coasts and those in the breadbasket.

Jack Morris
Scroll through Morris's social accounts and you'll soon be reaching for your passport. The 26-year-old travel influencer, who boasts more than 2.5 million Instagram followers, quit his carpet cleaning job five years ago to travel the world. In Going Solo he offers a master class in adventuring alone via personal stories and breathtaking photos.

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No 60 July 2017

Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre

Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre South Africa is an official partner of Rupes S.P.A Milan Italy.
We are a vehicle surface appearance specialists who supply and utilize the innovative range of the Rupes and Bigfoot polishing system to eliminate paint defects, drastically enhancing the vehicle's appearance and protecting the new defect-free surfaces.
Our services also extend to Yachts, Private Jets, Bikes and certain residential and commercial applications.
Equipped with optical instruments in our state of the art centre, we offer the best technical precision and excellent after care services.

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RUPES

Why Bigfoot Car Detailing Centre?

I have been involved in the detailing industry for over seven years now My days as a professional detailer began with Swissvax a good few years ago The day I decided to make it into a business, my main aim was to differentiate myself from the rest of the companies out there and I did this by associating myself back then with a premium brand like Swissvax, which was my stepping stone. Ever since then I have been lucky to establish a loyal client base including corporates such as Porsche SA, Daytona Group, Audi etc However, servicing my clientele was purely as a mobile business

I've always had the dream of establishing a centre but not just any detailing centre, something that would stand head and shoulders above the rest. My moto was from the beginning "When you do something, do it the right way or don't even do it at all."

Along came the launch of the Rupes Bigfoot Car Detailing Centres, with the first one being set up in Qatar What they did with that centre resonated with me and what I wanted to achieve with setting up my own centre here in South Africa. From polishing systems, to the revolutionary machinery, to the science behind the centre design, to the technical specifications around the lighting systems to the entire corporate image Everything was just unbelievable to witness and I saw my vision of developing a world class detailing centre in the Rupes Bigfoot brand

The opportunity to create a centre like no other in South Africa presented itself and I grabbed it with both hands.

The rest as they say is history.

The detailing industry in South Africa is still immature in comparison to the United States or Europe, however it has come a long way over the years with people starting to understand what the industry or rather what the profession is about It's not just about cleaning cars. One of my main goals is hoping to create a greater awareness about the industry and profession as well and share the knowledge I have gained over the years One of these ways will be via the Bigfoot Detailing Academy.

A first for South African detailing I have been invited to the Bigfoot European Seminar in March to present the SA detailing centre as well as to facilitate training sessions to over 400 attendees. I will be sharing the stage with some of the world's most renowned detailers, Gideon King, Larry Kosilla and Jason Rose to name a few

Bigfoot Detailing Academy

The centre in JHB will also become the first formalised detailing academy in South Africa with a formalised training curriculum developed by Rupes Global Training Director Jason Rose

Jason has been involved in surface treatment for 35 years and many may know him from his involvement with Meguiars and he is one of the most respected technicians in the detailing industry.

Bigfoot Product Range

Opening of the centre has also presented the opportunity to distribute the spectacular range of Rupes Bigfoot Polishers and accessories as well as the new range of Rupes Car Care Products The innovative range of Bigfoot polishers flipped the industry on its head and has revolutionised the industry worldwide It has become the detailer's tool of choice due to its ease of use, being very safe on paintwork and extremely efficient

Bigfoot Car Detailing Service Offering

We have various service offerings from our basic paint protection detail which takes about eight hours Complete interior detailing to our most comprehensive treatment - The Bigfoot Signature Detail, which will take anything from about five days to complete

Paintwork protection includes premium Swissvax Waxes and Gtechniq Coatings which come with a 7-year manufacture's guarantee

Our value-added services include the fitment of self-healing paint protection as well as vehicle wrapping utilising the best quality vinyl available in the market

Bill Nye

BILL NYE

His career in entertainment may have started with a Steve Martin look alike contest, but this Science Guy has become one of the bravest soldiers in the fight for rationalism. Meet the brains behind the bow tie

By **AMANDA PETRUSICH**

Bill Nye does not abide casual misuse of the word *incredible*. If you refer to some sophisticated scientific process in this way — the creation of more-durable crops through genetic modification, say — he will correct you, firmly. "No, it's *credible*. It's science."

Anyone who came of age in the United States in the early 1990s through the early 2000s can likely credit Nye with their understanding of one natural phenomenon or another. He has been dutifully demonstrating the scientific method to television viewers for more than 30 years, either as the host of one of several shows or as a bow-tied talking head debating a cable-news pundit. His television career started when he joined the staff of *Almost Live!*, a Seattle sketch comedy show, in 1986, and took off with *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, an educational children's show that aired from 1993 to 1998 on KCTS-TV, Seattle's public broadcasting station, and was syndicated nationally via PBS. On the show, Nye would scramble about the set in a baby-blue lab coat, meticulously breaking down topics including biodiversity, space travel, gravity, animal locomotion and pollution, usually through such antics as hurling a desktop computer off the roof of his studio or pretending to be buried by an avalanche of trash.

Bill Nye the Science Guy won 19 Emmy awards and was followed by another PBS series, *The Eyes of Nye*, and several books. The latest, *Everything All at Once: How to Unleash Your Inner Nerd, Tap Into Radical Curiosity and Solve Any Problem*, is out July 11. In April, Nye debuted a new Netflix series, *Bill Nye Saves the World*, which features a rotating cast of celebrity accomplices — including, in its very first segment, supermodel Karlie Kloss and rapper Desiigner — and is aimed more toward edifying adults than toward educating kids, though this does not preclude moments of supreme goofiness. Nye cites both Steve Martin and Carl Sagan as early influences.

"Science came first, without question", he says. We're drinking coffee in a hotel suite in midtown Manhattan while the city is in the midst of a colossal downpour. "But ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to be funny. It was valued."

Nye was born in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1955. His mother was a code breaker for the Navy during World War II, and his father worked in advertising. After graduating from Sidwell Friends — a prestigious private school popular with presidential offspring from Archibald Roosevelt to Sasha and Malia Obama — he enrolled at Cornell, where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. It wasn't until later, after friends had cajoled him into entering a Steve Martin look-alike contest (he won), that he became interested in comedy.

He still gets defensive about his academic bona fides. In 2016 Sarah Palin disparaged Nye at a screening of *Climate Hustle*, a film that questions the accuracy of climate science. "He's a kids' show actor; he's not a scientist", she said. As chilling as it is to admit, Palin wasn't wrong. Nye never went to graduate school, nor has he ever held a job in a lab. In other areas, this sort of institutional validation wouldn't matter — nobody cares whether Jimi Hendrix had a master's degree in composition — but in an academic discipline, it's significant.

"Mechanical engineering is nothing but science", Nye tells me. "That's all it is. I took six semesters of calculus. Is that enough? I studied fluid mechanics, heat transfer, the design of mechanical components. So, deal."

Nye will tersely defend his scientific qualifications, but in some ways his background as a comedian is his greatest asset. These days, intellectualism of any sort is often read as snobbery, a luxury of the so-called coastal elite. It makes sense that the country would turn to a beloved celebrity for help with a complex public issue like climate change. And our greatest scientific thinkers, though overloaded with degrees, are likely not as quick with a quip or as willing to use physical comedy to illustrate the laws of nature.

Given all that, Nye may seem an unlikely lightning rod for controversy. He advocates only for established scientific beliefs, not fringe theories. But he has detractors, some of them vocal, many of them online. "Everywhere I go, people will say, 'Wow, thank you for your work. You're doing a great job.' But when I look on the electric internet, there are a few people who just hate me", Nye says. "I mean, I get involved in debates on purpose."

"THERE ARE PEOPLE RUNNING AROUND WHO THINK THE EARTH IS FLAT. NO, IT'S NOT FLAT. LOOK AT THE PICTURES DUDE."

A popular video on YouTube called "Those 7 Times Bill Nye Went Beast Mode" contains, despite its title, mostly footage of Nye responding calmly and carefully to increasingly hysterical accusations. Trying to understand popular scepticism in the face of objectively provable facts could drive a less durable man insane. In this, though, Nye is indefatigable. American culture has arguably never been more resistant to empiricism or more confused about what objective truth looks like. "There are people running around who think the Earth is flat", he says. "I thought it was a joke at first. No, it's not flat. No, you can see — look at the pictures, dude." He appears worried. "In my life, science has never before been set aside like this."

• • •

The next time I see Nye is in Montclair, New Jersey, USA, a moneyed suburb about 25 kilometres west of Manhattan. *Bill Nye: Science Guy*, a recent documentary about his life and work, is screening at the Montclair Film Festival, and Nye is there to participate in a post-screening Q&A with Stephen Colbert, Montclair's most famous resident.

Before the screening, I chat with the security guard manning the backstage entrance. He has a wispy postadolescent mustache and is waving around one of those metal-detection wands. "I want to get a picture", he says. "I've been watching Bill since pre-K." Outside the theatre, lined up on the sidewalk, I see a teenager wearing a T-shirt with the periodic table on the front, several children in lab coats and what appears to be a formidable collection of high school science teachers. People are waiting outside in the rain.

Nye arrives at the theatre on time, scurrying from the backseat of a dark SUV toward the venue. When I greet him by the door, right away he asks me how his bow tie looks. Nye inquires after his bow tie a lot. "It's very important", he says.

Nye also remembers the name of every single person he meets, even if he's being introduced to a whole roomful of new faces at once. He is gently irritated by bullshit — when I dopily tell him his tie looks "amazing!" he gives me a look like, *Come on* — and prefers that hangers-on keep up with his hyperkinetic pace. He says the word *dude* a lot — more specifically, "Dude!" immediately followed by a quieter and more censorious "Dude." If you provoke a "Dude! Dude" you will immediately regret your entire approach.

Montclair's Wellmont Theater has a seating capacity of about 1800, and I've been told the event is "wildly sold out". Colbert and Nye meet up before the screening, in the make-up room. The previous day, Nye taped a segment for *The Late Show*, to air the following Monday. "You're just nailing it, man", Nye tells Colbert as a make-up artist applies powder. "And of course, you have so much to work with."

"Almost too much", Colbert replies. Colbert is a devout Catholic, and Nye is agnostic, but the two seem to have an instinctive rapport.

Nye watches the film seated near Colbert. It's a revealing portrait. Nye has never legally married or had children (he joked to me about his inability to commit to a woman), and he frets about staving off ataxia, a movement disorder characterised by a lack of muscle control. Both of his siblings have been diagnosed with the condition, which can be caused by a defective gene.

Midway through, when footage of Ark Encounter — the controversial creationist theme park in northern Kentucky run by the apologetics ministry Answers in Genesis and infamously subsidised by the state — appears onscreen, a little boy of around six seated directly behind me yells, "That looks fun!" The boy's parents frantically shush him. No doubt they've seen Nye's 2014 debate with Answers in Genesis president Ken Ham at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. At one point in the debate, the moderator, Tom Foreman, asked both men, "What, if anything, would ever change your mind?" The moment immediately felt demonstrative of something larger, more fundamental. Ham was flummoxed by the question. "I'm a Christian", he said. "As far as the word of God is concerned, no, no one is ever going to convince me that the word of God is not true." Nye allowed that his mind could easily be changed. "We would just need one piece of evidence", he said.

Back in Montclair, during the talk-back, Colbert recites an Isaac Asimov passage from "A Cult of Ignorance", an essay Asimov wrote for *Newsweek* in 1980. "There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge'." The crowd applauds. "If the majority is always right", Colbert asks, "even if the majority believes something that isn't true, how does science approach that?"

"We just try to show the facts as often as we can", Nye says.

• • •

In *Bill Nye: Science Guy*, interviews with some of Nye's early colleagues suggest that Nye has always wanted to be famous — that he courts attention. Because he was a fixture of so many American childhoods (in the 1990s, nearly every exhausted science teacher in the US wheeled in a VCR and played an episode of *Bill Nye the Science Guy* on at least one occasion), he has an uncommon bipartisan appeal. He possibly endangers that appeal every time he appears on another conservative talk show and is forced to position himself as part of the resistance rather than as an apolitical public thinker. Still, Nye repeats the virtues of science so tirelessly, it's hard to question his intentions.

After the event, I come upon him in the green room, lecturing a clump of grinning acolytes about the efficacy of solar panels. I'm struck, again, by the consistency of Nye's vision. He appears to care chiefly, if not exclusively, about just two things: leaving the world better than he found it (an aphorism he learned from his father) and responsibly educating as many people as he can. He seems to believe that if he talks frequently enough, and loudly enough, about what's at stake for the world, his message will eventually change some minds. This is how he justifies all those cable-news appearances.

Colbert walks a young friend in a bow tie over for an introduction, and Nye launches into a quick lesson on how to properly stage a selfie. He has an educator's instinct and a claw-like grip on an iPhone. (He makes a little *"Blagh!"* sound right before snapping the shutter, "to get people laughing".) The young man regards Nye with a kind of pie-eyed wonder. When fans come upon him in the flesh, they often look as if they're meeting Santa Claus. Nye, of course, would find this comparison absurd. He is, as he'll be the first to tell you, very real. Very human. It's science. ■

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Tia Hurley

Photography by **RYAN DWYER** *Booked by* **MAINSTREET PRODUCTIONS**
Text by **JASON FLEETWOOD**

About me
I am a model and yoga instructor in Long Beach USA. I was born in Fort Carson in Colorado USA, but I've spent most of my life in California. Modeling and teaching yoga are both full-time jobs. I'm in love with what I do.

My hobbies and interests
In my spare time I enjoy riding my beach cruiser around the city and indoor rock climbing/bouldering at my favourite gym.

My goals and career ambitions
As for my career goals with yoga, I am currently in school to become a yoga therapist. My goal is to one day open my own private clinic or studio specialising in yoga therapy for the visually impaired and individuals who have recently come out of comas. As for modeling, my goal is to continue getting published, to venture into acting and to see where the road takes me. I like surprises.

Who inspires me
Cher. She's the greatest.

My favourite quote
"Music is the emotional life of most people." Leonard Cohen

Turn on
The rustic outdoorsy look has always been my favourite. I've never been able to resist it. I also love a man with a positive easy-going energy. Also being an animal lover is a plus.

Turn off
I find cookie cutter men quite boring. It's difficult to go alongside a person if everything is bland and plane. Spontaneity is the key.

The perfect date
A day of hiking along the coast when the weather is overcast.
Complete with homemade lunches and wine.

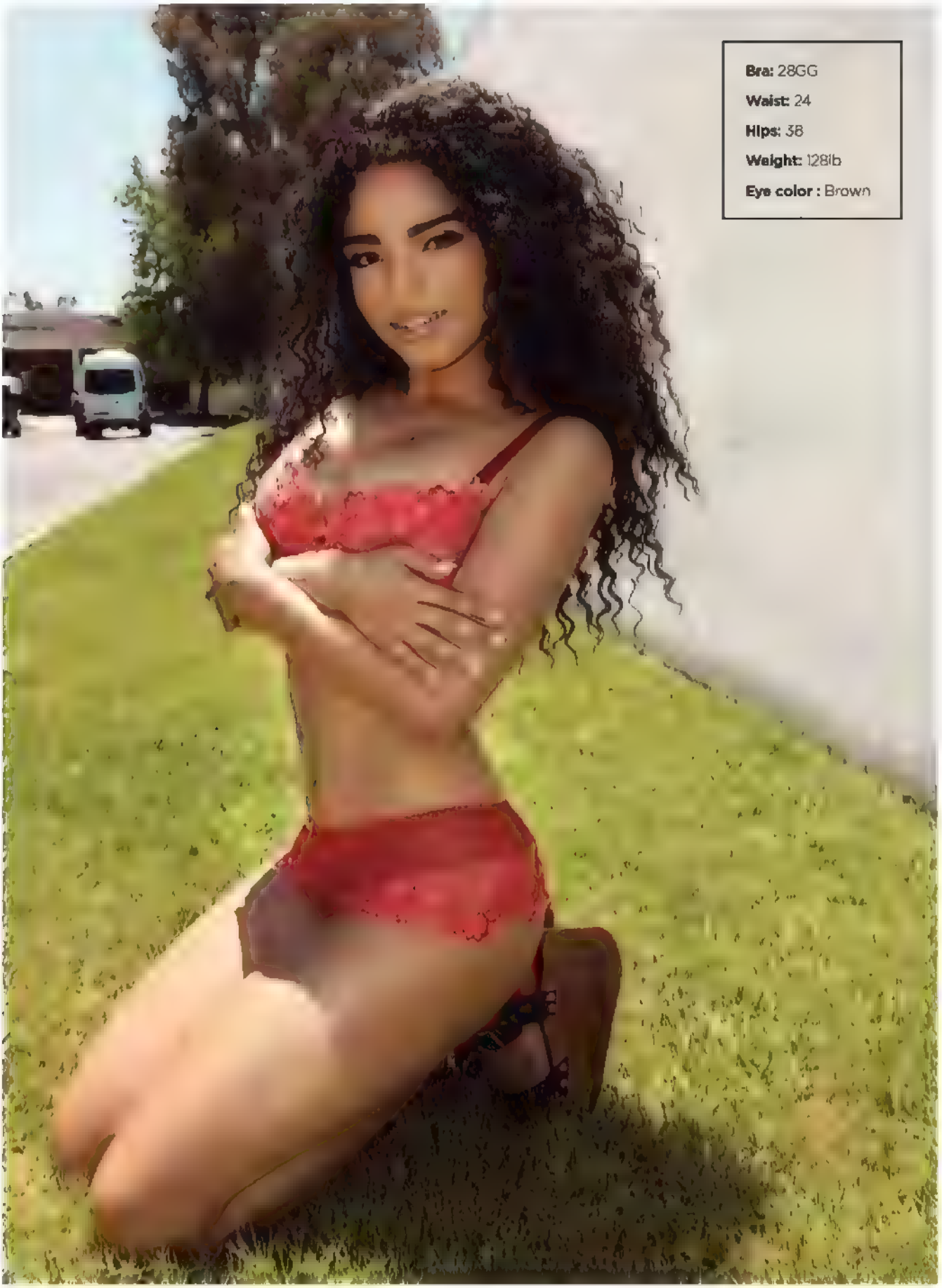
My favourite food
Red curry with tofu.

My biggest fear
Moths.

One destination I would love to visit
London, England.

I'm not embarrassed to say
When I'm alone, I eat almond butter right out of the jar with my hands. Even when there's a perfectly good spoon within reach.

For more awesome updates you can follow Tia on Instagram @tia_hurley_

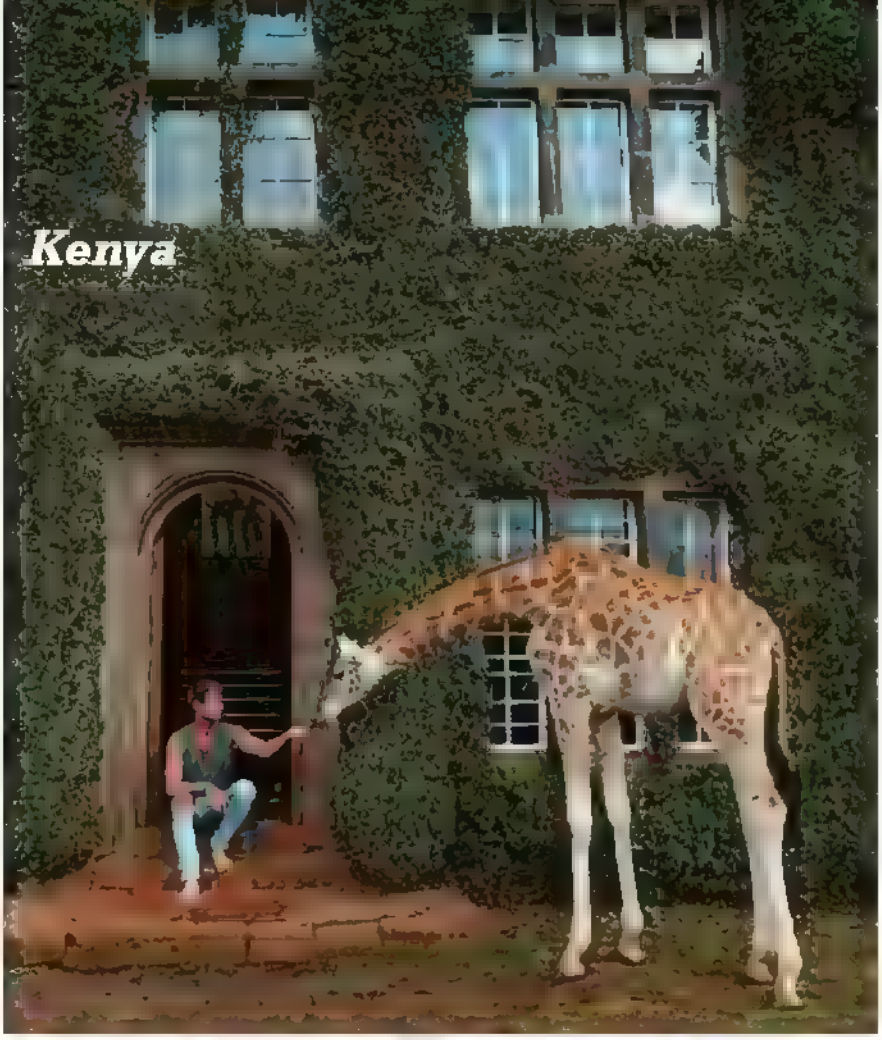

Bra: 28GG
Waist: 24
Hips: 38
Weight: 128lb
Eye color : Brown

Among adventure-craving millennials, solo travel is becoming the new way to break free. Unaccompanied excursions are up almost 10 percent since 2013, according to recent data from Millward Brown, and a Topdeck Travel survey reveals that nearly 30 percent of millennials travelled alone in 2016. Chalk it up to Instagram's college-age travel bloggers stoking our impulse to seek out new horizons — and to platforms like Airbnb allowing us to act on that impulse without waiting for a friend to sign on. We asked 26-year-old professional wanderer Jack Morris, who quit his day job at 21 so he could focus on exploring the farthest corners of the world, to recommend some destinations that offer both breathtaking sights and other attractions uniquely suited to the solo traveller — from meditative hikes to private beaches. (With 2.4 million Instagram followers and brands including Disney and Belkin sliding into his DMs, Morris can be our travel guide any day.) Read on to find your solo summer adventure, be it a beach hang in Bali, a romp in the Rockies or something in between. — Nicole Theodore

GREEK ISLANDS

Happy hopping

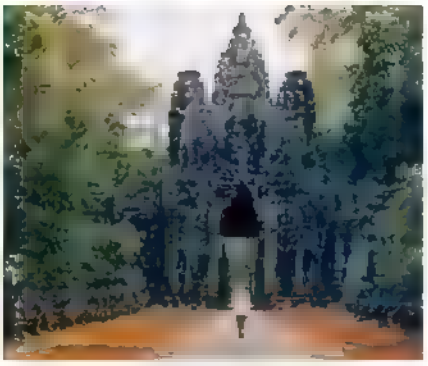
For the best island-hopping, I recommend Greece. Santorini has iconic white buildings and a town called Oia that's a popular sunset spot. Everyone thinks Ios is a party island and it is — but it's also a big place to explore, you can go cliff-jumping into crystal clear waters or take a scenic drive around the whole island. Mykonos is famous for its white-and-blue houses, you'll feel like you're on a movie set. If you want to check out a Greek island off the beaten path, try Zakynthos (pictured on opposite page). It's an easy flight from Athens and should definitely be at the top of your list. In the north of Zakynthos you'll find Navagio, otherwise known as Shipwreck Beach. Drive to the top of the cliff and walk around — it has one of the best views I've ever seen. But Milos, about 100 kilometres north-west of Santorini, is hands-down my favourite Greek island. It's quiet and peaceful, and you can tour aimlessly on a motorbike, discovering cool shit.



SOUTHEAST ASIA

Alone together

Many people head to Southeast Asia on their own, so it's a great place to meet like-minded travellers. Visitors often take in Thailand, Cambodia (below), Malaysia, Bali, Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia on a single adventure, but if you have to pick just one of those locations, make it Bali. I'm probably biased — I live there — but it really does have it all: amazing cafés, beaches, landscapes, culture and a carefree vibe to match.



Montana *Lakes for days*

This destination will be closer to home for most of you but no less amazing. When I worked with the Montana Office of Tourism, most nights I would drive into the Rockies to find the perfect spot to watch the sun go down. During the day, Glacier National Park's Lake McDonald (above), with its coloured-stone lake bed and mountain views, is a must-see. The highlight of my time in Montana was a trek to Cracker Lake — a huge, extremely blue (and beautiful) lake in the northern part of the state.

Morocco

Casablanca style

I once drove through Morocco, which is mostly desert, in a battered old car that shook when I got it up to 80 kilometres per hour. I'd be driving through sandstorms or rain, and the windshield wipers would stop working. It was actually a lot of fun. I recommend starting in Marrakech and renting a car. Camping in the desert was the highlight of my Morocco trip — I bedded down outside my tent and fell asleep under a clear sky with seemingly infinite stars. About 560 kilometres north of Marrakech is Chefchaouen, also known as the Blue City, where you can check out blue-washed 15th-century buildings. Along the way don't forget to stop in Casablanca for some Humphrey Bogart vibes. (Right: Aït Benhaddou, a Moroccan village and UNESCO World Heritage site.)

Sri Lanka

Swings and stairs

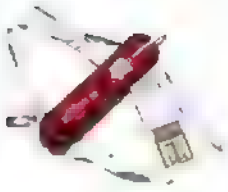
I'm not a big hiker, but Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka is incredible. It takes about four hours — up thousands of stone steps — to reach, but once there you'll experience incredible mountain views. When I visited I watched 75-year-old women climbing all the way to the top to perform rituals. Sri Pada ("sacred footprint"), a six-foot rock formation at the summit, is believed by many to be the footprint of Buddha. If you're looking for something closer to sea level, check out the rope swing over the ocean in Unawatuna (above), on the southern tip of the island.

Jordan

A wonder of the world

A lot of people have misconceptions about Jordan because it's so close to Syria, but the country is safe and Jordanians are unbelievably friendly. You'll meet a ton of people, but it's best to make your own adventure. Visit Petra, Jordan's famous archaeological site in the southwestern desert, at night. Its Siq (entrance) and Treasury are lit by hundreds of candles. Relax and listen to Bedouin music while enjoying the view of one of the seven wonders of the world. (Below: the desert valley of Wadi Rum.

THE GEAR EVERY TRAVEL NERD NEEDS



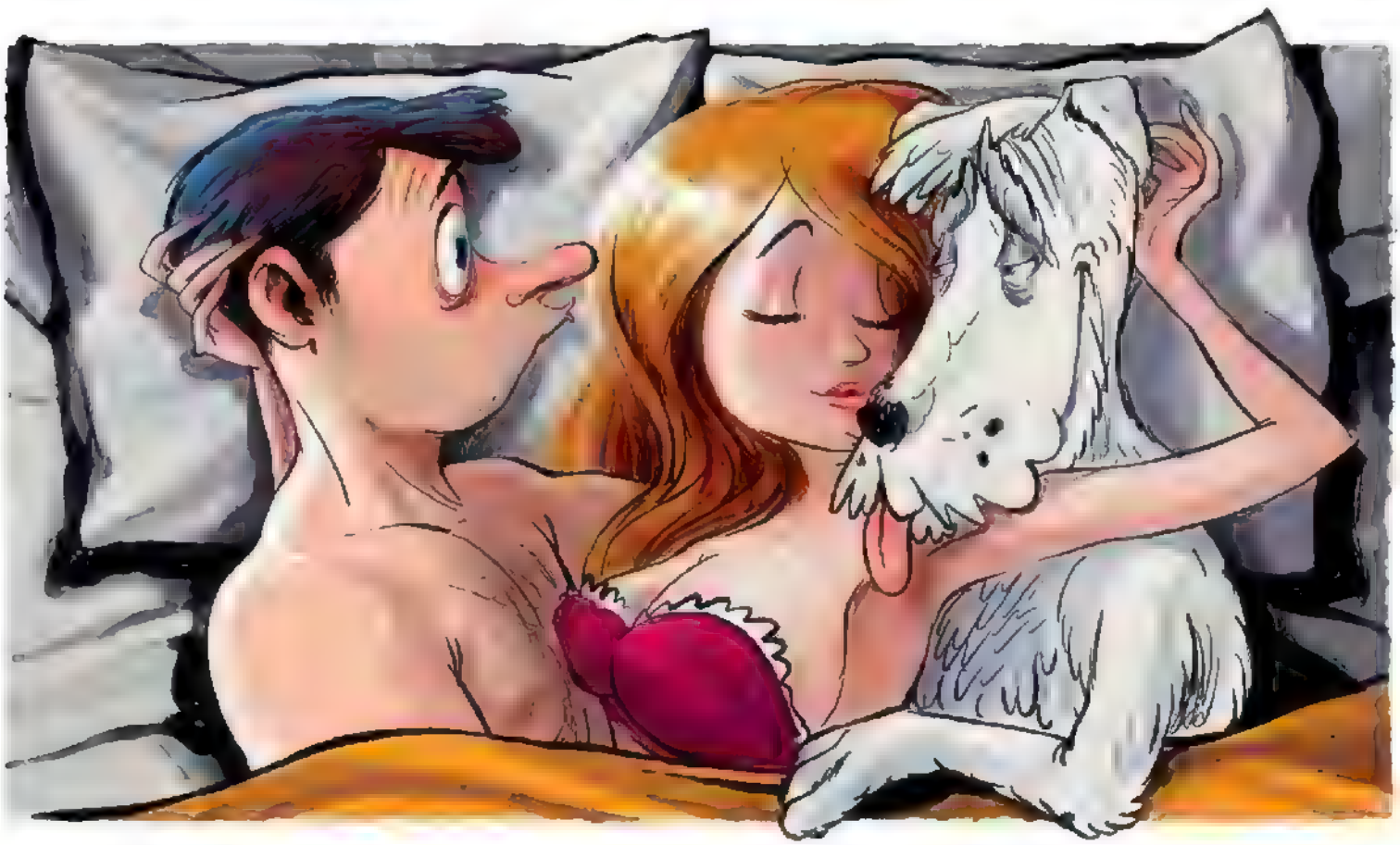
Sri Lanka

No shoes, no stress

This island off the northern coast of Madagascar is paradise. Getting there from the States is expensive, but if you have a bit of money and want to clear your mind, it's the place for you. It's also a barefoot island. The minute you get off the boat, you put your shoes in your bag. Constance Tsarabanjina, the small resort there, has a few luxuries but is kept very natural. The 25 villas are well spaced, so it's private. You can walk around the entire island in about an hour. Definitely on the to-do list: snorkeling and diving. The water is the clearest blue and home to astounding wildlife and reefs.

Playboy Advisor

Columnist Bridget Phetasy on what to do when man's best friend turns you into a third wheel. Plus, advice for a guy whose girlfriend desires a different kind of threesome



Q: *I hate dating dog owners. I love animals, but getting close to a woman with a dog seems impossible. Hear me out: The animal always comes first. Where and for how long we go on a date depends on when her pet needs to be walked, played with or fed. She can't sleep at my place because she has to "take care of the dog." I've recently been hooking up with a woman I really like, and she's hinted at getting serious. I would... but she has a dog. Do I tell her the truth and risk sounding like an asshole by demanding to be number one in her life? — CD*

A: Let's start by agreeing that this isn't a "female dog owner" issue. All pet owners, male or female, are bonkers. Have you ever seen a man whose dog has just died? I've seen one cry harder over the loss of his dog than over his own mother's death. Not just cry — weep. Men are just as conscientious as women about tending to their canines. Now back to your question. Yes, pets always come first, and they should. They're helpless creatures that depend on their owners to stay alive. I would know. I have a boxer. Does it suck sometimes? Yes. My dog has interrupted me three times since I started writing this. Does it impinge on my freedom? Absolutely. But that's what I signed up for when I got a dog, and that's what you sign up for when you date a woman who has one. Asking a pet owner to care less about his or her dog is like asking a single parent to pay less attention to his or her kid. So no, I wouldn't risk "sounding like an asshole by demanding to be number one", because that's the moment she'll realise you're an asshole. If you truly care about her, start bonding with the dog ASAP. Invite her and the dog to spend a night at your place. Buy a dog bed. It's her best friend, and getting on that animal's good side will be the key to her heart. Honestly, I don't trust guys who don't like dogs. Being a pet owner is a huge responsibility, and you should respect her for taking it on while still making time for you. Otherwise, start looking for a cat lover.

Q: *I live in a small city and have been single for years. Whenever I go on dating apps, I come across the same people — some of whom I've already dated — over and over again. Swiping through pictures and having inane text interactions with strangers always leaves me feeling empty. I know I'm ready for a relationship, but I worry that the willingness and excitement in my messages rub women the wrong way. What can I do to make sure I don't come off as too eager?* — *CA*

A: Trust me, I live in a big city and even I feel this way. When you're single long enough, every city becomes small. I get it. But remember, you spent a lot of years enjoying your bachelor life, and there was a time when those "inane text interactions" made you feel alive instead of dead inside. Just because you're ready to settle down with an adorable wife and get your breed on doesn't mean it's going to happen immediately. Don't get jaded. Don't get anxious. Desperation is never a good look, and humans can smell needy pheromones a million miles away. People tend to make bad decisions in a state of panic to the point that they're much more inclined to settle for someone less than they deserve. Thirsty is the last thing you want to present yourself as when you match with a woman you like. So be honest about what you want, and no matter how much rejection, flakiness or vanity you face, remain confident that the right woman is out there looking for something meaningful, too. Theoretically, all it takes is once. My tip? Behave exactly the way you behaved when you didn't want a relationship. It's a law of nature that the minute you let go, that thing you've wanted so badly will come to you. I guarantee that once you embrace single life again, "the one" will show up where you least expect her to.

Q: *I can't come when I have a condom on, which obviously makes safe sex awkward with women I don't know well. Any tips on how I should explain this? I assume asking her to go bareback isn't an option, right?* — *PS*

A: The first sign of an amateur in bed is someone who resists safe sex. I'm a stickler about it, I make zero exceptions when it comes to using condoms. Honestly, it trips a warning signal when a man can't come with a condom on, because either (a) he's not an experienced lover, (b) he's married or (c) he never practices safe sex. I know I'm with an accomplished lover when he rolls up with his own rubbers. There are no protests and no questions asked. Maybe you've been in a long-term relationship for most of your sexual history and are just now single again. If so, allow me. Condoms are an irritating but mandatory aspect of single life, and the sooner you get used to them, the better. Some tricks: Use the thinnest ones you can find and put a couple drops of water-safe lube on both the inside and the outside of the condom. A lot of this is psychological. Men tell themselves, "I can't stay hard when I put a condom on." Get over it. Practice putting one on and keeping it on while you masturbate at home. Sure, safe sex can be "awkward", but once you get past that amateur view, you'll realise not only is it for the best, it can also be part of foreplay. And no, asking her to "go bareback" is not an option. Also, not an option: asking her to suck your dick instead. If she offers, well, that's on her, but you're not entitled to an orgasm, and she isn't required to give you one.

Q: *I'm 31 years old. Should I feel ready to settle down and have children? I don't.* — *LB*

A: Haven't you heard? Forty-one is the new 31. Look, everyone comes of age at different times. You shouldn't feel anything other than what you're feeling. You can't force something as important as being ready to take on the massive financial and emotional responsibilities that come with marriage and children. By the way, this path isn't for everyone. And how can you truly prepare for eternal monogamy and kids? You can't. Most people in successful long-term relationships tell me they recommit to the relationship one day at a time. Also, life hands us curveballs. Sometimes, being ready isn't about what you can live with, it's what — or whom — you can't live without. And upon realising that, voila — ready or not, you're ready.

Q: *My girlfriend and I have had many threesomes with other women, but now she wants to have a threesome with another man and me. Should I participate even though the idea of her with another man — and the idea of another penis so close to mine — turns me off?* — *SS*

A: There's often a disconnect between what turns you on in a fantasy and what turns you on in real life, and your brain and your dick aren't always in agreement. In fact, research has found that in response to watching MMF pornography (for the newbies, that's one woman with two or more guys), men ejaculate more sperm, ejaculate with more force and get a second erection sooner. Chalk it up to what evolutionary biologists term "sperm competition." So don't knock it till you've tried it. I also think it's only fair. Unless you expressly said "I will never entertain the idea of another dick in this equation" at the start of your threesome journey, you owe it to her to open your mind and give it a shot at least once. If you hate every minute, you never have to do it again. But you may find your dick loves watching her get fucked, you naughty cuck, you.

Q: *I don't like my girlfriend's friends. I'd rather do my taxes than go to her friend's barbeque, where I'll be forced to engage in basic small talk. Is our relationship doomed, or is there a way I can do my own thing?* — *JE*

A: It's important to carve out personal time, but relationships are about compromise, which, from the sound of it, you suck at. If that's the case, all your relationships are doomed — not just this one. Everyone must engage in small talk on some level. But that's a separate issue. More important, your girlfriend's friends are a strong indicator of the kind of person she is. You need to ask yourself if the company she keeps is a deal breaker for you. If so, get out, because it's only gonna get worse.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZOHAR LAZAR

HIGH-SPEED AMERICAN DREAMS

January 29, 2017 was a warm winter day in southern California, USA. The sky was hazy, and white light bounced off the road running between SpaceX headquarters and the ass-end of a Costco. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, standing at a lectern next to SpaceX founder Elon Musk, called this paved slice of post-industrial heaven "the cradle of aerospace". I had come for a glimpse of the future — not in the hangars housing the company's beautiful minds and rocket ships, but in the pipeline-like tube directly behind the mayor and Musk. Six feet in diameter, it ran on a 1.6km track adjacent to the SpaceX complex.

"Today", Garcetti said, "we are looking at the very first Hyperloop pods. This is the future of transportation."

I was among 2000 sweaty technophiles packed onto two sets of metallic grandstands at the finals of the first-ever SpaceX Hyperloop Pod Competition. Also on site were 800 members of 27 competing teams, mainly from academic institutions. The finalists had been distilled from more than 1200 applicants around the world. That day, only three of the teams would successfully run their pods on the SpaceX Hyperloop test track.

Like many Californians, I'd been thrilled when the high-speed rail project, Proposition 1A, passed in 2008. It meant we would finally have a bullet train connecting LA to San Francisco in under three hours — normally at least a seven-hour car trip. Musk hated the idea, so he outlined an alternative scheme, called Hyperloop, that he presented as an open-source white paper in 2013. In Musk's vision, passengers would pay $20 to board levitating, capsule-like vehicles, called "pods", that would zip through tubes on a bed of air at a cruising speed of 1200km/h, just shy of the speed of sound. Total travel time between the two cities would be 35 minutes, and the environmentally sustainable system would supposedly cost less than 10 percent of Prop 1A's $64 billion budget.

In the four years that followed, several companies assembled around the idea. Yet none had managed to build pods, which raised the question: Will we ever get to enjoy this magical ride?

Enter the international student body.

"What this [competition] is intended to do is to encourage innovation in transport technology", Musk said that afternoon, "to get people to think about doing things in a way that's not just a repeat of the past but to explore the boundaries of physics and see what's really possible. I think we'll find it's more incredible than we ever realised." The crowd buzzed, high on the possibilities of yet another Elon Musk dream-wave. After the speeches, observers finally got a chance to see in action a few of the 27 prototypes. Cameras mounted inside the tube recorded the pods' runs, with the feeds projected on nearby flatscreens. It took each pod more than 30 minutes to load and depressurise; as I waited, I walked down the road where the teams had their booths. Here was Keio Alpha, a cash-strapped team that had smuggled its miniature pod from Tokyo in a carry-on bag. There was Delft University of Technology, a Dutch team awash in corporate sponsorship. I spotted Carnegie Mellon and MIT but was quickly drawn to the University of Cincinnati booth, where the 30 students on the Hyperloop UC team couldn't stop smiling. Most of them were from India, though others hailed from Jordan and Vietnam.

"We were the first to achieve static levitation", said a 26-year-old structural-engineering student from Pune. No wonder they were giddy. They'd made a vehicle float on air! Still, my mind drifted toward another phenomenon: being an international student from, say, India or Jordan, and living in red state Ohio in 2017.

Hyperloop UC was no anomaly; 20 of the 27 teams represented US schools, several of them in states that had tilted Trump. Many teams were stocked with international talent, mostly from India — which makes sense. During the 2015–2016 school year, more than 1 million international students attended US universities, most coming from China or India to study science or engineering. I wasn't surprised to see that reflected at the competition, but the timing made it poignant. Just two days earlier, after a campaign brimming with anti-immigrant rhetoric, President Donald Trump had signed a travel ban on citizens from six Muslim-majority countries.

Granted, the executive order didn't directly affect the UC students. None came from the banned countries, and only one is Muslim, but Trump has repeatedly criticised the 26-year-old H-1B visa program, which has become a popular way for companies to hire skilled high-tech foreign employees and for international students to work in the US after graduation. Plus, Indians are often viewed as Middle Eastern terrorists by America's racist immigration foes — who, as Aziz Ansari said on Saturday Night Live the day after Trump's inauguration, are "not usually geography buffs".

The afternoon of January 29, the streets were hot at Los Angeles International Airport as protesters there demanded the release of travellers detained under the ban. And here I was, a stone's throw from America's neo-industrial darling Elon Musk, South African immigrant and one-time international student turned unapologetic advisor to the new president.

As I chatted with the UC students, an approaching scrum behind me captured their attention. In a bubble created by SpaceX PR cadets and a towering bodyguard, Musk floated from booth to booth, talking shop with the star-struck contestants. I drifted away, more fascinated by the students and their stories than by the technology.

I thought of them again a few weeks later, after I learned that a gunman in suburban Kansas City had shot two 32-year-old Indian engineers in a bar. Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani had both attended grad school in the US before landing jobs at Garmin, the world leader in commercial navigation technology, which snagged them coveted H-1B visas. Kuchibhotla and Madasani were, in a sense, the Hyperloop UC students seven years from now: brilliant engineers who left home seeking the American dream, hungry to innovate and change the world.

As the gunman approached them that evening, he yelled, "Get out of my country!" Then he pulled the trigger.

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Hyperloop sounds futuristic, but the concept isn't new. It's based on a simple law of physics: Momentum creates resistance, or drag. Most of the fuel consumed by any vehicle is burned to overcome this drag, which is why aeroplanes travel at high altitudes, where the air is thinner. However, air can be thinned in an enclosed space, which increases speed and energy efficiency on the ground.

Futurists have been evolving and patenting versions of the transportation system since 1915, but thanks to his company Tesla and its commitment to solar, Musk is America's leading innovator in alternative energy and transportation. So, when he described a netzero-energy transportation system that zooms through solar-panel-lined tubes — dialled to the atmospheric-pressure equivalent of flying at an altitude above 150 000 feet, connecting two of the nation's great cities in less time than it takes to fly — it had a profound ripple effect.

Musk's 2013 white paper, "Hyperloop Alpha", reached Dhaval Shiyani, Hyperloop UC's eventual captain, two years after its release. A 26-year-old

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW LYONS

fluid-dynamics researcher in the University of Cincinnati Aerospace lab, he was working the graveyard shift in dorm security when he stumbled upon the document online. This is something that could and should happen, he thought, so why hadn't it? Shortly after Musk announced the inaugural Hyperloop competition on Twitter in June 2015, Shyam began to pitch it to friends in the engineering department. Eventually he gathered a group of five classmates, all of them from India, around a conference table. "All of us knew in the back of our minds that if there is any place in the world where we can get this done, it is America", he says.

Born and raised in Mumbai, Shyam always wanted to be an astronaut; growing up in one of the world's most densely populated cities could make anyone want to rocket through thin air and float above the mayhem. He read up on Neil Armstrong and the early Apollo missions. As the years passed, Shyam's life swirled with Americana. First came classic pop culture: Friends and Seinfeld. Then Steve Jobs released the iPod, Shyam's first true love, and his GPS was locked on the US. "It was the fairy-tale story", he says. "It's where all the great inventions seem to come from. It's the land where your dreams come true."

Hyperloop UC's initial 2015 meetings were all high-concept. Nobody had built a tube or a pod. Shyam was confident his team could scratch out a workable system for their first filing in the competition, but if they were to be selected to present their concept to the 80-judge panel at Texas A&M in January 2016, they needed cash and more brainpower. Shyam knew whom to call.

Sid Thatham, 26, landed at the University of Cincinnati from Chennai in 2012 to study engineering, only to discover he was a born connector. Thatham was everywhere on campus. He tapped into nearly every student group, became student body president and befriended university vice president Santa Ono. All this in addition to working toward a Master's degree in chemical engineering while pursuing an MBA. Still, Thatham found room in his schedule for Hyperloop. It was the kind of opportunity that had inspired him to study here. "The US is still the land of opportunity", says Thatham, who became the team's business lead. "You can work on futuristic, life-changing things. That's how lots of international students see it."

Instead of mimicking Musk's LA-to-SF blueprint, Shyam, Thatham and friends detailed a Hyperloop Midwest that would connect Cincinnati to Chicago in 30 minutes. Competition was stiff, but Hyperloop UC survived two cuts and was invited to Texas as one of 124 teams selected. The teammates perfected their presentation on the 30-hour road trip to College Station, stopping in a Starbucks for a vital wi-fi infusion. Their proposal impressed the judging panel, which included faculty members and SpaceX engineers. They made the finals but didn't finish in the top five, which would have provided seed money to start building a pod. So Hyperloop UC had to raise its six-figure budget from scratch.

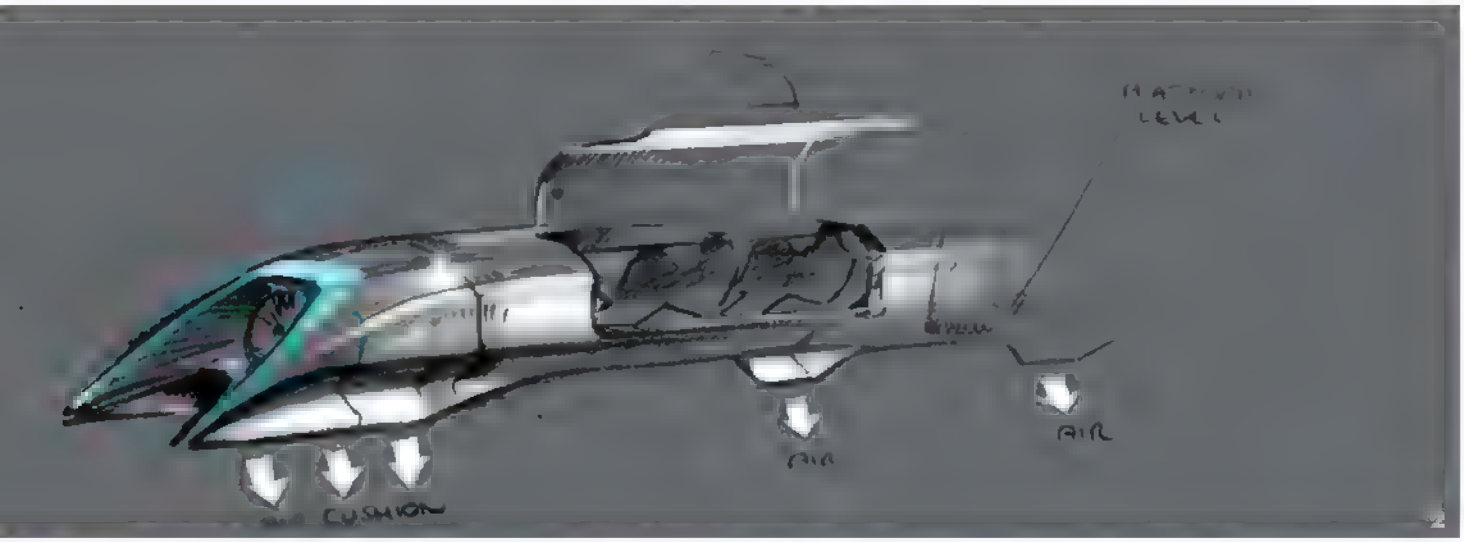
Thatham knew from his experience in student government that money was often buried in department budgets, so he went mining for it. He tweeted Ono from Texas and met with him as soon as he returned. As a result, the team scored $50 000. The engineering school also kicked in five figures, as did the provost. Meanwhile, Shyam filled out the technical team, and two local family-owned manufacturers signed on to provide materials and guidance. Tri-State Fabricators built the pod's frame at no cost, and Cincinnati Incorporated sourced materials and provided guidance.

All of which set the stage for an epic all-nighter leading up to the pod's unveiling at UC's alumni centre on October 17, 2016. The team knew that no pod had yet achieved levitation. This was an opportunity to snag an engineering first. For much of the pizza and caffeine-fuelled session, there were no errors, yet no joy.

Finally, just after nine AM, the pod rose. It floated only a few millimetres, but levitation had been achieved. The team went wild.

At two PM, Shyam and Thatham unveiled their pod in front of their teammates, university trustees, manufacturing partners and state-wide media. Everyone was floored. What began as a Shyam thought bubble had encompassed dozens of students from all backgrounds, the school administration and private industry, and become a point of pride for the entire city. Somewhere outside that bubble, a bitter presidential campaign rumbled, but inside the alumni centre, Democrats, Republicans, native-born Americans and immigrants had come together to achieve something unprecedented, and they left the

Foreign students contributed more than $30 billion and 400 000 jobs to the US economy last year.



unveiling believing their team had a chance at winning the whole damn thing.

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Flash forward four months to the suburbs of north-east Kansas. Olathe, a city of 133 000 and the seat of Johnson County, is set roughly 30 kilometres south-west of Kansas City and is pure Rockwell 2.0. The air is fresh, the shady streets are dotted with affordable single-family homes sporting basketball hoops and American flags, and thanks to a two-decade infusion of tech capital, it's now the centre of the Silicon Prairie, an area that spreads like golden grain across Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. Families from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East have moved in, and Olathe's school district teaches students who collectively speak 84 different languages. Indians make up the largest immigrant group in the county, which explains the spice shops and restaurants, the Sikh and Hindu temples, and the Bollywood hits at the local AMC theatre. Most international residents work at major corporations such as Sprint, Cerner, Honeywell and of course Garmin, Olathe's homegrown navigation-technology firm and the city's second-largest employer in 2015. Its steel-and-glass headquarters are filled with industrial-design studios, engineering labs and flight simulators — and it's just down the road from Austins, Olathe's most popular sports bar. That's where Srinivas Kuchibhotla and Alok Madasani, friends who worked in Garmin's aviation group, landed around six PM on February 22.

The two well-known regulars, nicknamed by staff "the Jameson guys" after their preferred sipping whisky, sat at a table on a small, sheltered A-frame patio strung with white Christmas lights to enjoy a smoke. "That was our place to hang out after work", Madasani tells me. They had originally met at Rockwell Collins, an Iowa engineering firm, in 2008, and when Kuchibhotla landed a coveted job at Garmin in 2014, he recruited Madasani to join him. "He was more than a friend", he says. "He was my family."

Moments after they arrived at Austins, Adam Purinton, 51, a Navy vet turned air traffic controller turned out-of-work IT specialist, bellied up to the bar. He nursed a beer before wandering out to the patio, where he approached the engineers. He asked if they were in the country legally and reportedly shouted a racial slur loud enough to attract attention. The guys ignored Purinton, and Madasani went inside to alert management. Another patron, Ian Grillot, 24, intervened and helped escort Purinton out.

Kuchibhotla, a graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso with a master's in electrical engineering, and Madasani, who studied engineering at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, were among the 100 or so Garmin employees in the US on valid H-1B visas. In recent years that program has been tainted by loopholes that enabled Indian outsourcing agencies to bring over foreign-educated workers to replace American staffers at reduced salaries. That has led to midlife layoffs for many Americans, who have occasionally been asked to help train their replacements. Instead of closing that loophole or refining an otherwise productive program that has enabled US-educated engineers such as Kuchibhotla and Madasani to establish residency and contribute to the American economy, Trump vowed time and again during the campaign to dismantle the H-1B program.

With the energy spoiled, the guys asked for their check, but according to one of the bar's owners, Kirk Adams, another patron had already picked it up. Instead, all the waitresses on staff came out to give them hugs. "It was their way of saying 'We have your back'", Adams says. The men were touched, and since they weren't carrying any cash, they ordered another round on a credit card so they could tip the staff. What was ugly had turned beautiful, and they wanted to show their gratitude.

They were still at their table 30 minutes later when Purinton returned. This time he walked straight toward the patio, wearing a white scarf over his mouth and holding a gun. Before he could turn around Madasani heard someone yell, "He's back with a gun, man!" Then Purinton said what he said and started blasting. Kuchibhotla was hit three times. Madasani tried to escape and was shot once, through the thigh. Both men fell to the ground, and Purinton took off running. Grillot had been hiding under a table, counting gunshots. Assuming Purinton was out of bullets, Grillot chased him as he headed around the corner. After about 30 feet, Purinton turned and fired again. Grillot was shot through the hand, forearm and chest but would survive. Patrons and staff attended to the wounded men, who were rushed to KU Medical Center in Kansas City.

Purinton resurfaced at an Applebee's in Clinton, Missouri, where he confessed to the bartender that he had just killed "two Middle Eastern men" and was on the run. The bartender kept him calm while she secretly dialled the authorities. Around the same time, police drove to Kuchibhotla's home. They rang the doorbell and informed his wife, Sunayana Dumala, that her husband was dead.

Like gunshots in the suburban night, word of the shooting echoed through the social media feeds of the local Indian community and in the halls of tech firms and temples. A candlelight vigil was held at First Baptist Church. Garmin held its

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1 Hyperloop UC celebrated months of all-nighters with a West Coast sunset after the first pod competition
2. A design sketch from "Hyperloop Alpha," Musk's 57-page open invite to realise his Jetsons-like transport system. 3 A rendering of Hyperloop UC's pod

own memorial two days after the incident, and a temporary shrine was set up in front of Austins, where mourners placed flowers. The first bouquet came from Kuchibhotla's family in India — an offering to the bar's staff and owners, a gesture of shared grief.

Johnson County charged Purinton with first-degree murder on February 23. He's looking at 50 years with no parole. The FBI immediately began to investigate the incident as a hate crime. Whether or not those charges are filed, hate does appear to be the primary motive, and you can add it to an expanding blotter. The Southern Poverty Law Center, the nation's leading anti-discrimination group, has recorded 1,863 "bias-related incidents" between Election Day and March 31. According to Heidi Beirich, Director of the SPLC Intelligence Project, 40 to 50 incidents per month is typical, she believes the recent increase has to do with the political discourse peddled by Trump and his supporters. "We've been tracking the relationship between political rhetoric and hate crime statistics for some time", she says, "and we've noticed when a population has been demonised by popular political figures there tends to be an uptick in hate crimes."

I arrived in Olathe five weeks after the shooting and spoke to dozens of people across the ethnic and political spectrums still shaken by the violence. I visited a mosque where immigrants from Algeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Egypt gather to pray. It's not lost on them that Purinton's bullets were meant for Muslims. Still, a poster decorated with hearts, left at the mosque's doorstep after the shooting, hangs on a wall inside. It reads, in part, YOU BELONG.

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Back in Cincinnati, the Hyperloop UC team regroups after a series of setbacks cost them the competition in California. Sid Thatham's schedule is so full he seldom goes home to the two-bedroom apartment he shares with three friends. He has eight classes and two part-time jobs, continues to lead Hyperloop UC's business unit and remains involved in student government, which is why he sleeps on his office floor and showers in the gym four days a week. But he never complains, because he knows the rule.

Momentum creates drag.

His reward for all this hard work is a ticking clock. "It starts the minute I get my degree", he says. Those on student visas have 60 days to either get a job, and the coveted H-1B visa that comes with it, or head home. He's scheduled to graduate in August. "The school has career development centres. They can put you in touch with people with job openings, but will they be able to hire international students?" Some of that depends on the president.

On April 18, Trump signed an executive order that placed the H-1B visa in jeopardy. "You feel like you have a chip on your shoulder", Thatham says. "You have to keep proving yourself at every stage. I just have to keep working as hard as I can and hope it pays off."

The departure of people like Thatham, who in April won the University of Cincinnati's Presidential Medal of Graduate Student Excellence, is unlikely to benefit the US economy. According to a 2016 report from the Kauffman Foundation, "more than half of America's 'unicorn' start-ups have at least one immigrant founder, and immigrants are nearly twice as likely as the native-born to start a new company." The loss of H-1B opportunities may also discourage foreign students, who, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, contributed more than $30 billion to the US economy last year and created or supported more than 400 000 jobs.

Those are just the hard numbers. Although the majority of the Hyperloop UC team members are Indian, several Americans jumped onboard early, and even more are involved now. Julian Gregory, a Cincinnati native and undergraduate industrial-design student who joined as a freshman in 2016, would like to see his teammates have the option to remain stateside and compete. "These guys are geniuses", he says. "They're coming to our country to contribute something innovative, and I don't think that should be understated or undervalued."

Like Thatham, Shyam is set to graduate this summer. Whether or not he's granted an H-1B visa, his efforts will live on. Although Hyperloop UC won't be at Hyperloop Pod Competition II in August, the team hopes to build their own Hyperloop-like link in Cincinnati, between the university's east and west campuses. The pods won't travel at high speeds, but they will levitate, and with the school already behind the project, it's a good bet it will be the world's first functional transportation system of its kind. Meanwhile, Shyam is working to set up what he calls an "Advanced Transportation Research Center" at the engineering school. It will focus on pods, drones and autonomous and electric cars. Soon the university will be better equipped to educate American and international engineers and to shape the future of transportation. All because an ambitious Indian kid working the graveyard shift read the futurist musings of another immigrant engineer who had his own American dream. ■

NICHOLAS GUREWITCH

The PLAYBOY PHILOSOPHY

INSTALLMENT — FEMINISM

By **COOPER HEFNER**

Feminism. Like love, the word holds a lot of different meanings to a lot of different people. At first glance, feminism has a simple definition — advocating women's rights and equality between the sexes — and yet it still carries a lingering undertone, prompting as much debate today as it has over the past century. Along the way, PLAYBOY has been both a defender of the movement and, depending on whom you ask, its enemy.

The relationship between PLAYBOY and feminism began during the latter's second wave. Having secured the right to vote with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, American women started taking aim at social as well as political targets after World War II. An American renaissance was afoot as the country drove into the 1950s, promoting a national conversation about sexual mores and gender roles. This shift in mindset, which unfurled over the next two decades, ushered in a cultural and societal revolution. Above all, the second wave challenged the place of women in a society that expected them to serve as docile housewives and not own their sexuality.

PLAYBOY occupied an overlapping space, using its pages to explore the curiosities of sex, champion the rights of the individual and redefine what it meant to be an unapologetic critical thinker, while celebrating pleasure. Our pictorials didn't just scare religious radicals, they also disturbed and offended many feminists. It became common practice in many feminist circles to equate PLAYBOY with the regressive male gatekeepers of the United States who insisted that women weren't entitled to subjectivity — or, for that matter, their own sexual objectivity.

In 1963, freelance journalist and future feminist icon Gloria Steinem authored a popular piece for Show magazine outlining her point of view on the negative work environment at one of the Playboy Clubs. Although the internet wasn't around at the time, stating the article went viral would be an appropriate comparison today. Among her findings was that the Bunny Manual, a guide for all new hires, contained reminders that there are "many pleasing means [the waitresses] can employ to stimulate the Club's liquor volume." In the ensuing national debate, it became clear that the target was shifting from the ballot box to the bedroom.

Half a century later, as we navigate the current wave of feminism in real time, we find ourselves in a bit of a grey area. Many of today's feminist influencers, including Beyoncé, Ellen DeGeneres and Lena Dunham, have celebrated PLAYBOY while honouring the work of pioneering feminists like Steinem. If cultural heavyweights like these can balance both philosophies in their minds, then the question arises again: What is feminism?

To us, the answer is simple. It's the right for one to freely choose the life she wants to live.

The problem is less about the definition of feminism and more about how we interpret sex today. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Steinem and other feminists made necessary arguments for the time, often targeting PLAYBOY in the process. They stood up and announced that women were, are and always will be more than sex objects. Setting aside the fact that we've made that same point continually for nearly 64 years, PLAYBOY pointed out a fallacy that often accompanies this line of thought: that sex itself is the enemy. To us, that perception is an exact contradiction of what feminism is and indicates a detachment from healthy human desires.

I'm reminded of a point my dad made in Esquire back in 2002.

"Women are the major beneficiary of the sexual revolution. It permitted them to be natural sexual beings, as men are. That's where feminism should have been all along. Unfortunately, within feminism, there has been a puritan, prohibitionist element that is anti-sexual."

While much of this rings true, I disagree with his main assertion here. We are all equal beneficiaries of the sexual revolution, because it allowed both men and women to state, in a collective voice, we all like sex.

Every intelligent man and woman should desire to be a sex object. Demonising that desire denies an essential component of what makes us human, of what allows us to connect on a level that is oftentimes challenging to articulate in words — of what permits our very existence. Simply put, conscious and consensual objectification of self and other is what keeps the world going round.

There will be other waves, and we will participate in those too. But as we continue to ride this one, it is clear as day that PLAYBOY's Philosophy today as well as tomorrow is as feminist as it gets. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY KATIE BAILEY

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

A candid conversation with the filmmaker on the through lines that bind his sprawling canon — from Memento to the Dark Knight trilogy to his new World War II epic

The gateway to the Los Angeles compound of Christopher Nolan, director-screenwriter of such cosmic brain-twisters as *Inception*, *Interstellar* and the *Dark Knight* trilogy, is a bit of an illusion, a false front. Visible from the tree-lined street is a gated, late-1930s Spanish-style home with a generic economy car squatting in the driveway. With the night lighting, the location could serve as one of those ostensibly benign and potentially lethal southern California backdrops in *Memento*, Nolan's moirish 2000 thriller about a man with faulty short-term memory who struggles to find his wife's murderer. Nolan once resided here, but now it serves as his postproduction facility; the garage contains his editing suite. Exit the building's rear doors and the bottom drops out as dramatically as one of the trapdoors in *The Prestige*, Nolan's 2006 tale of two rival magicians. A rambling expanse of green gives way to another head-spinning shift: Nolan's primary residence, a much larger and more modern setup that recalls the bold serenity of a Frank Lloyd Wright design.

"You can tell a lot about people from their stuff", observes a character in *Following*, Nolan's self-financed 1998 feature film debut. Indeed: Inside the soaring structure, light-suffused but somehow hushed and *Batman* moody, the living room is done up in cool, muted tones and furnished with low-slung chairs. Connecting shelves neatly lined with books reach the ceiling. A large framed photo of Stanley Kubrick's empty director's chair, a gift from *Interstellar* star Matthew McConaughey, occupies a place of honour. The abode, like the 46-year-old writer-director-producer who inhabits it, along with his wife, producer Emma Thomas, exudes good taste, intelligence, confidence — and a certain mysterious formality.

Christopher Nolan, creator of some of the most ambitious and challenging blockbusters of the past 20 years — grossing more than $4.2 billion in global aggregate box office and counting — was born in London on July 30, 1970. His father, Brendan Nolan, ran his own marketing consultancy, and his American mother, Christina, was a flight attendant and later taught English. The middle brother of three, wedged between the eldest, Matthew, and the youngest, Jonathan, Nolan grew up in London and Chicago. *Dazzled* by his first viewing of *Star Wars* in 1977, he borrowed his father's Super 8 camera and began to make short films starring his action figures.

Nolan attended Haileybury and Imperial Service College and, later, University College London, which he sought out for its filmmaking facilities. There he met his wife-to-be, and with the technical equipment the school afforded its students he began to spend his off-hours shooting the short films *Tarantella* (1989) and *Larceny* (1996). Upon graduating, Nolan travelled the world, shooting corporate training videos and filming another short, *Doodlebug* (1997), in which a man driven to distraction by an insect finally hammers it with his shoe — only to discover he has flattened a tiny version of himself. In 2000, he and Thomas married; today they have four children.

In 1996, Nolan began shooting and Thomas began co-producing, on weekends, the self-financed, micro-budgeted *Following*, in which Jeremy Theobald plays a struggling writer who,

"The Dark Knight Rises expresses what I'm afraid of: that our shared values and our cherished institutions are far more fragile than we realize."

"When I was about seven, my dad lent me his Super 8 camera, which at the time was expensive and high-end. I literally taped it to the bottom of our car and smashed it to bits."

"Dunkirk is all about physical process, all about tension in the moment, not backstories. It's all about 'Can this guy get across a plank over this hole?'"

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GAVIN BOND**

desperate for raw material, shadows strangers through London and uncovers more about the city's criminal underbelly than he bargained for. Mounting success and acclaim followed, as well as a few unrealized projects (including an as-yet unfilmed Howard Hughes movie, which Nolan considers his best script), but everything changed when, girded by the good reviews and box office for 2002's *Insomnia*, he met with Warner Bros. brass to propose a more relatable reboot of *Batman*. Three angsty and financially dizzying *Dark Knight* films later, Nolan found himself atop the moviemaking universe, praised as a rare filmmaker who could breathe eccentricity, high art and bracing intelligence into the behemoth-scale international blockbuster. As one critic put it, Nolan and company helped wipe "the smirk off the face of the superhero movie."

With an unbroken string of hits from *Memento* right up through 2014's *Interstellar*, Nolan is now about to unveil *Dunkirk*, a brawny, laconic World War II passion project that stars Tom Hardy, Mark Rylance and Kenneth Branagh, among others including pop star Harry Styles in his first substantial acting gig. Even to critics and fans who have been prodding Nolan to make a more obviously personal movie, the PG-13-rated *Dunkirk* is a high-stakes gamble — but then, the same could be said of every other project he's taken on. We'll soon know whether Nolan's obsessive internet superfans, dubbed "Nolantes", will follow their celluloid god into theatres to watch a real-life saga of self-sacrifice, heroism and esprit de corps.

Stephen Rebello, who last interviewed Matthew McConaughey for Playboy, spent an afternoon at Nolan's live-work compound and filed this report: "Nolan's unblinking gaze, rich vocabulary and agile mind make it clear that he is, indeed, the visionary who, in *Inception*, sent Leonardo DiCaprio through the City of Light as it folds in on itself. Volleying ideas with him can almost make one feel like a character in one of his films — absorbed, spooked and often a step or two behind. As he sipped cup after cup of Earl Grey tea, he let our conversation range from the nerdy (Brownian motion) to the playful (the irrefutable appeal of Harry Styles). He is averse to pettiness and bullshit, and though candid, he pumps the brakes when the conversation drifts outside his comfort zone. Several of his associates warned me that this interview would be 'uncharted waters' for a man as private as Nolan. But he navigated the sometimes choppy seas just fine."

PLAYBOY: The *Dark Knight* trilogy, like most of your films, is drenched in paranoia, guilt, chaos and powerful depictions of societal collapse. What scares and unsettles you in real life?

NOLAN: In today's world, anarchy scares me the most. Both the Joker in *The Dark Knight* and Bane in The *Dark Knight Rises* tap into things that are very powerful to me in terms of the breakdown of society. With Bane, it's the fear of demagoguery and where that can lead. The *Dark Knight Rises* is far more extreme in that regard than I think anybody realised while watching it. In the first two Batman films, we'd had the threat of the breakdown of society, the threat of things going horribly wrong. With The *Dark Knight Rises*, we wanted to make a film in which we said, "Okay, let's actually go there", so we thought about people in Manhattan being dragged out of their Park Avenue homes. We really tried to go there, and we did, and I think we got away with that one. [*laughs*]

The thing that appalls me about the state we find ourselves in is that it feels increasingly self-inflicted.

PLAYBOY: Got away with it because some movie-goers and critics completely miss that kind of pointed political commentary when it's couched in a comic-book movie?

NOLAN: I never saw these films as comic-book movies. My thought was, I am going to try to make great movies first and foremost. But an iconic character like Batman does give you certain latitude with the audience. They'll follow you to places they wouldn't follow you without that familiar icon in the centre. The *Dark Knight Rises* expresses what I'm afraid of — that our shared values and our cherished institutions are far more fragile than we realise. A lot more people than there were a year ago are as afraid of that as I am now.

PLAYBOY: Considering that fear, how pessimistic or optimistic are you that our shared values and cherished institutions will survive?

NOLAN: When the chips are down, I've got a lot of faith in humanity and faith that things will work out. Some of my friends will be amused to hear me say that I'm an optimist, because I often present myself in a very pessimistic light. I worry and complain about a lot of things in today's world. I want the world to be better than it is right now, and I have faith that, eventually, it will be. Right now, though, it's looking like we are condemned to live in interesting times. The thing that appals me about the state we find ourselves in is that it feels increasingly self-inflicted. We were making great progress in the world. Things were going well. We had two generations of prosperity, two generations in the West that didn't have direct experience of war. I'm very frightened that this leads people to not remember how wrong things can go in this world.

PLAYBOY: The power of dreams and nightmares is one of your many themes in *Inception* and elsewhere. Do you have persistent dreams or nightmares?

NOLAN: I've never fought in a war. It's my worst nightmare to do so.

PLAYBOY: A majority of critics and fans seem to welcome the nonlinear storytelling, complexity, ambiguity and cutting-edge science you bring to your movies. Do your detractors ever confront you about making movies that are too chilly or just plain baffling?

NOLAN: I've had a lot of that response. I've skipped out of the back of movie theaters — like at the end of *Inception* — before people could catch up to me. Alan Parker once observed that all cinema is manipulative, and I suppose that's true. I try not to be overly manipulative — or I try not to be obvious about it. That gives people a little more freedom to interpret the movies their way, bring what they want to it. I've had people write about my films as being emotionless, yet I have screened those same movies and people have been in floods of tears at the end. It's an impossible contradiction for a filmmaker to resolve. In truth, it's one of the things that is really exciting about filmmaking, though. I seem to be making films that serve as Rorschach tests.

PLAYBOY: So, unlike old-time Hollywood director Howard Hawks, who admitted that even he couldn't make heads or tails of the plot of his classic 1940s detective thriller *The Big Sleep*, you can explain every twist and turn of your movies?

NOLAN: I think Hawks knew exactly what was going on but was probably making a point about

what matters. Premise matters as opposed to plot — plot being the stuff that can fall away. I have to be fully in control of the mechanism and underlying reality of the film, even if I want an ambiguous response from the audience. I had an interesting moment with my brother Jonathan during the Venice Film Festival in 2000, the first time we ever showed *Memento* publicly. I had no idea whether we would get booed out of the cinema, but we got a standing ovation that went on and on. Afterwards, I was asked at a press conference what the meaning of the ending was, and I gave my response. While I was having dinner with my brother later, he said, "You can't ever do that." I was like, "Well, I just answered the question." He said, "The point of the film you made is that your opinion isn't any more valid than anyone else's." I hadn't thought of it in that way, but a lightbulb kind of went off. The film has a productive ambiguity to the end, as does *Inception*. I have to know the truth as I see it for that ambiguity to be genuine, as opposed to it being an evasion. But the point Jonathan made to me and that I've carried with me ever since is that I can't ever tell people what I think, because they will always elevate that above the ambiguity, the mystery. And they shouldn't, because the text, the grammar of the film is telling you. *You can't know these things.* They're unknowable, because they're unknowable for the character.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of mystery, over the past few years your collaborators have publicly described various unique personality traits of yours. It has been noted that you constantly drink Earl Grey tea, especially when you're working on set or on location. Considering how you've been doing just that since this conversation began, let's call that rumour true. Do you also carry your American and British passports at all times?

NOLAN: At all times? That would be——

PLAYBOY: Okay, at most times?

NOLAN: In 1999, after the Rotterdam film festival, I left for the airport to catch a plane to London for a meeting. I didn't bring my passport. Travel is very important to me. My mom was a flight attendant, and when I was 15 we got free aeroplane tickets, so I was able to travel the world. Always being efficient at travel, I never check a bag. This once, I went, Oh, it's the EU — and therefore I wouldn't necessarily need a passport. It was a complete brain fart. Finding yourself at the airport with a plane to catch without your passport? I still travel so much that, yeah, when I'm working, I keep my passport with me at all times, in a safe place.

PLAYBOY: Checking out another rumour, can you be reached by e-mail?

NOLAN: No. I don't have an e-mail address.

PLAYBOY: If I were given a phone number, told it was yours and decided to call it——

NOLAN: Nothing would ring. I don't have one. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: And you don't allow cellphones on set?

NOLAN: I don't tolerate distraction, so I don't tolerate people using their phones on set because they are exiting the bubble of our creative process, exiting the reality we're creating. Their brain is off somewhere else. They're no longer collaborating. We've been through different phases. We used to have people not bring their phones at all, but that's not practical now. Now it's that they're switched off, so no one uses them. If you need to use the phone, leave, go use it. That way there's no pretence of sneaking a glance. I've had crew members who chafed at that but actually came to value it, because they can lose themselves in the work for the whole morning and then catch up with messages at lunchtime. I also don't tolerate lateness. If somebody's on time and engaged, anything else is fair game.

PLAYBOY: You're very dapper and buttoned-up right now in a blazer, vest and pocket square. Barring extremes of weather or terrain, is this how you dress on set?

NOLAN: Other crew members get to dress in a practical manner for the job they have to do. I've always worn a jacket like this. Back in school, I had a uniform and got very used to the jacket pockets and having my things right with me. When I started making properly budgeted movies with real crews, I remember going to pick up a sandbag and realising I'd offended the crew because that's not my job. I've always felt I should dress just the way I dress when I'm writing or doing anything else. I dress the way I'm comfortable, because directing isn't a physical job for me.

PLAYBOY: Everything looks uncomfortable and physical and immersive in your new movie, *Dunkirk*, about the evacuation of Allied soldiers who were cut off and surrounded by the German army during World War II's Battle of France.

NOLAN: I've been drawn to the story over many, many years. It's not a battle as such, it's an evacuation, a race against time, a communal effort to save the day, so it's more a survival story than a war film. But one of the appalling things about war or conflict is that we send our children to fight them. I didn't want to do what movies always do, which is to cast 28 and 35-year-olds as 18 and 19-year-olds. We cast a very wide net, pulling people out of drama schools, people who were deciding if they wanted to go to drama school, people just finishing high school, people who didn't have agents, particularly when we had to search for the lead role we call "Tommy", who is played by Fionn Whitehead.

PLAYBOY: How did it work out filling a key role with a genuine international pop star — One Direction's Harry Styles?

NOLAN: He's fabulous in the film. Again, we auditioned many people. He earned it. He's a superb talent and really delivered the goods with great passion. I'm excited for people to see what he's done in the film. We're trying not to oversell that, because it's an ensemble film. But he's pretty terrific, in my opinion.

PLAYBOY: Tom Hardy plays a Spitfire plane pilot, and his scenes are solo, airborne and sometimes with an oxygen mask covering the bottom half of his face. Having gotten so much blowback from audiences complaining that they couldn't understand much of Hardy's dialogue as Bane in *The Dark Knight Rises*, let alone the complaints you got about sound effects and music drowning out the dialogue in *Interstellar*, are you risking an encore?

NOLAN: It's always interesting when people take you on about technical issues. It's completely fair, but people don't know what goes into the process. Armchair technicians don't understand that, whether it's *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Interstellar* or *Dunkirk*, I've spent eight months listening to every sound, balancing everything incredibly careful-

I can't ever tell people what I think; they will always elevate that above the ambiguity, the mystery.

ly and precisely, modulating it and listening to it in different theatres. On *Interstellar*, with our sound crew and the composer Hans Zimmer, we were trying to do something exciting, beautiful and different — something raw, real and crude at times, the way Hoyte van Hoytema's camerawork was. We weren't completely shocked by the response, because we knew we had gone pretty far with some of these things. But people seemed a little angrier than I expected. With Tom on *The Dark Knight Rises* — I mean, he's such an extraordinary actor. We spent a lot of time talking about it. He put a lot of work into it, and what he did was fascinating. I had him try a more moderate version of what we were shooting. It didn't work. The voice is inextricably linked with the character, which for someone whose face you don't see and whose mouth you don't see move is pretty amazing. To this day on the dub stage we do that voice all the time.

PLAYBOY: Hardy's aerial scenes in the Spitfire should, especially for audiences who see *Dunkirk* in IMAX, pack a punch.

NOLAN: The Spitfire is the most magnificent machine ever built. I got to fly in a two-seater version, and the power in that — there's just a grin on your face from takeoff to landing. There's a very immersive quality to the way we've done the flying sequences. To be able to give audiences that experience, we needed to have special lenses built, we needed all kinds of technical things to happen. We've done things nobody has ever done before, taking actors up in a real plane and shooting real cockpit shots in a large-film format. It was a huge ambition for the film, and my team really pulled it off.

PLAYBOY: Are you generally a daredevil, a sportsman?

NOLAN: I don't do anything particularly interesting. I try to get a little exercise. I like the ocean. I like getting out on a stand-up paddleboard. But it's only once a movie is done, shipped, everybody has seen it and it's come out that I can relax. That's when we like to travel and get a big long holiday.

PLAYBOY: Some of the *Dunkirk* actors seem to be part of some unofficial Christopher Nolan stock company, including Tom Hardy and Cillian Murphy. On previous movies you've worked several times with Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Marion Cotillard and Joseph Gordon-Levitt. What's the dynamic between you and actors?

NOLAN: I've always loved what they do and have been a good audience for them. I don't look at a monitor. I'm really paying attention to what they're doing on the set, just as an audience member. My filmmaking style is very tactile. I do a lot of close-ups, and actors feel a concentration from the camera, as well as from me, on what they're doing. On *Dunkirk*, we spent weeks with Mark Rylance and Cillian Murphy on this tiny boat with a huge IMAX camera right up in their faces. I had to warn them that IMAX cameras get very loud, but I had to be that close because I'm interested in the minutiae of the performances, trying to capture the layers of all that in a form that's readable for the audience. Actors recognise that I don't have the slightest bit of ego or expectation when it comes to performance. I'm not trying to control or puppeteer; I'm trying to give them the space to do something that excites me. If it's not quite right, I'm trying to help them.

PLAYBOY: Do you worry that fans of your trippy sci-fi and superhero movies may not follow you into World War II?

NOLAN: There's definitely risk with that, definitely discomfort. At the same time, Emma, my wife and producer, and my other collaborators felt very much the same way with this one as we did with *Inception* and *The Dark Knight*. We've always tried to push the boundaries of what we've done. I wouldn't be doing my job right, wouldn't be doing myself any justice, if I weren't uncomfortable with each film for some reason. So yes, it makes me nervous, but that feels right.

I have an enormous amount of freedom and trust from the studios that work with me, particularly with Warner Bros., which I've worked with almost exclusively. As a filmmaker who has earned that trust, I have a responsibility to try to do something with that freedom and make the film I really believe in, one that might not fit squarely in the usual Hollywood model. *Inception* was a radical proposition for the studio at the time, but we were coming off *The Dark Knight*, which was Warner's biggest film to date. We felt strongly that we had to do something with that great opportunity.

Dunkirk, for different reasons, has a similar feeling for us. It's a huge story, one of the great stories of human history, in my opinion, and it works its way into pop culture in all kinds of ways. The idea of the communal effort to save the day, victory from the jaws of defeat — there are all kinds of primal elements in this story, and it has never been told in modern cinema. Why is that? Well, one of the reasons is it requires a substantial set of resources. It requires the backing of a major studio. It requires a grand scale to do the story justice. And so my feeling was, I can get this done now and I should; otherwise it isn't going to get done.

So yeah, I see that as something of a responsibility. That is to say, if you've earned a bit of trust and freedom from the studio, you really want to try to do something with it that couldn't get done in another way.

PLAYBOY: How persuasive is it to Hollywood that you tend to bring your films in on schedule and within budget?

NOLAN: I started working that way for very pragmatic reasons. When studios give you millions of dollars for your film, the best way to secure yourself some creative freedom is to stay on time and on budget. If you're the one they're not worried about as you're shooting, if you're not the fire they have to put out, they'll leave you alone. If they don't feel taken advantage of, that's a huge asset to you as a filmmaker, in terms of your creative freedom, and they reward you for it.

PLAYBOY: Did the fact that Warner Bros didn't feel "taken advantage of" help get your *Dark Knight* trilogy off the ground?

NOLAN: Yes — and people always miss this key piece. After *Memento* I did *Insomnia* for Warner Bros, with Al Pacino, Robin Williams and Hilary Swank. I worked with movie stars. It had action. It had locations. So I did my $3 million film *Memento*, and then I got to do a $47 million movie. That gave the studio a kind of comfort with letting me go to the next step with *Batman Begins*. That was fortunate, because filmmakers today aren't being given that same chance. People are being taken straight from Sundance and then given $250 million films to direct. When I'm used as an example of how that can work, you want to put your hand up and go, "No, that isn't what happened." I value that I got to do a medium-budget studio thriller or drama. Those are getting harder and harder for people to make. At the time, Batman

I wouldn't be doing my job right if I weren't uncomfortable with each film for some reason. That feels right.

was kind of up for grabs, and the studio was open to someone coming in and telling them what they wanted to do. They wanted to invigorate it. I kept talking about the origin story and the 1978 *Superman*. Although it has some dated elements now, it was the closest thing to what I had in mind — an epic film with a realistic texture.

PLAYBOY: Getting back to genre films: When you see superhero movies, which seem to be coming out every week now, and so many of them follow what feels like a dark, gritty template, what's your reaction?

NOLAN: My reaction is complex. I remember some of the *Dark Knight* trilogy came out and I think *Iron Man* also came out. Marvel was gearing up what it was doing. I remember having a lot of conversations with marketing and distribution: If the comicbook movie is a genre, then we're worried about being overcrowded. But if you don't view it as a genre — if you just view these as temporal movies — then there's plenty of room. As with everything, you reach a point where things get a little overcrowded in terms of how much of one particular product has been made, but for us and our relationship with the Batman films, we always wanted to view them as movies in their own right. That felt like the most respectful way to treat beloved subject matter. It's like, Trust us, we're just going to make as good a film as we know how to make. And I think the world has changed since we made this film. I think fans are more particular about the colour of the movies they want to see and how closely they want those to adhere to what they've seen on the page. We were given a lot of freedom and trust by the fans, and hopefully we did right by them.

PLAYBOY: Part of that realistic texture of the *Dark Knight* movies came from the screenplays and, of course, definitive performances such as Heath Ledger's Joker. What do you most remember about him in that role?

NOLAN: He unveiled the character to us very gradually through the hair and makeup tests, through the early conversations and when he had to read a scene with Christian Bale. He'd do a little bit of the voice, just a taste, and then, as he tried on the wardrobe and experimented with the makeup and shoot tests, he'd move a little bit this way, talk a little bit that way, just slowly unveiling it to the crew. It was electrifying. Then he did this scene of the Joker in the kitchen — a lot of lines, a big monologue. We shot his close-up. There were a lot of actors around the table, and when we got to the end and I said "Cut", they broke into applause. I have never seen that before or since.

PLAYBOY: How did he react?

NOLAN: Very modestly. I feel privileged that Emma, my editor Lee Smith and I are the only people in the world who got to see that performance before he died. His achievement stands totally independent of his life and, indeed, his death, and I'm one of three people who actually know that. It makes me very proud to have been involved with such a fine piece of work.

PLAYBOY: That's extraordinary. Getting back to *Dunkirk*, did you and your team look at other movies?

NOLAN: We screen film prints of a lot of movies before each film we do. I usually try to find things that have some relationship that isn't necessarily entirely obvious, like the silent film *Greed*, which I always come back to because it's so incredible and heartbreaking, as incomplete as the existing version is. We also looked at the silent film *Sunrise*, which I hadn't seen before. It has the elemental quality of a fable and a simplicity of design. It's tough for some people in this day and age to tap into watching a silent film. You have to embrace silence the way audiences of the time would. The fabulous thing about silent films for filmmakers is that there is so much to be inspired by — or, to put it in more crude terms, you can steal from silent movies. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: Did you look at war films or films set during wartime?

NOLAN: Early on in my process, we took a look at *The Thin Red Line*, a great favourite of mine. It feels like it could be any war, any time, and it's very poetic, but that didn't feel right for what we were doing. We watched *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which James Jones described in an essay as a film that says war turns men into animals, and the longer they're at war, the more animalistic they become. After that, what else is there to say? Steven Spielberg lent me his print of *Saving Private Ryan*, which was as shocking and unpleasant as I had remembered. The second those bullets start flying, you didn't want to be in the theatre. That pushed us to go in a more Hitchcock direction — to create a different kind of tension, one that allows you to look at the screen a bit more and not hide your eyes.

I was daunted by the idea of approaching war head-on because I've never fought in one. As I said, it's my worst nightmare. But I was able to tackle *Dunkirk* in a confident way, knowing the mechanics of suspense and the thriller, and putting the audience in the perspective of the people on that beach, who would just see planes coming and bombs dropping. That's extremely frightening. Taking a more suspense-based, thriller-based approach actually freed me up. *Dunkirk* is all about physical process, all about tension in the moment, not backstories. It's all about "Can this guy get across a plank over this hole?" We care about him. We don't want him to fall down. We care about these people because we're human beings and we have that basic empathy. There's a very intense quality to *Dunkirk* and we put the audience through a lot, but there's tremendous positivity that results from that.

PLAYBOY: Did you have to go to the mat for analog film with *Dunkirk*?

NOLAN: People have no idea what's being lost with the digital intermediate process. It's very difficult to talk to the studio folks and postproduction guys because they'll say, "Well, you believe in magic", or "What you're saying is mystical." I just had to embrace that and go, "Yes, I suppose I am." Everything in movies is about mystery and magic and things beyond our understanding. Those hundreds of hours of decisions that in and of themselves are meaningless? Well, added up they're not meaningless, because in the end you feel something. Why does *Vertigo* work in a way

that so many other films like that don't? It's the colour, the different things that come together. It's mystical, it's emotional — an emotional connection we have with the experience of seeing a story on the screen on film. Just look at visual effects in films from 10 years ago. At the time you were fine watching them, but they don't hold up now. What's the difference? Our perception, to a certain extent, because we have an eye that develops over time. So whenever engineers turn around and say, "We've solved it. We've made video look like film", I say, "Well, you've done a good trick. For now." David Fincher loves to shoot digitally, and that's his right, but for me, the photochemical process is different. I'm not sure they're ever going to look the same, however many bits the technicians crunch.

PLAYBOY: David Fincher's actors have talked about his penchant for many, many takes. Several *Gone Girl* actors have spoken of doing 50 takes, and Rooney Mara reportedly had to do 99 takes on a scene in *The Social Network*. He has also released a director's cut of *Zodiac* and an "assembly cut" of *Alien 3*. Are you anything like that?

NOLAN: I always say that the audience tells me what the film is. That doesn't mean we always agree. But audiences seeing the film — that's the final piece of the creative process. It's like exposing copper to the elements. It changes what the thing is. But it doesn't make me then want to go back and have at it again. I've always viewed the filmmaking process as almost like a life performance or something. I would do reshoots if I had to, but I trust the production period. It's like, Okay, I've got six months to shoot the film and then I've got three months to do my first cut. I've always tried to trust those pressures and limitations and stand by the film by the end of it. Otherwise, where would you stop? You'd never finish. It's an imperfect medium. It always has been. Every film is imperfect. If there's something I've been unsatisfied about, you leave it and trust what it was. The impetus is to try to do better on the next film.

PLAYBOY: You wrote the *Dunkirk* script solo — that is, without your brother Jonathan, with whom you worked on The Prestige, The Dark Knight, *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Interstellar*. Was he too busy creating and writing for TV, on both *Person of Interest* and *Westworld*?

NOLAN: I never wanted to be a writer. I started writing because I needed to have the material to be a filmmaker. I discovered I couldn't write a novel, because I'm embarrassed and I find it difficult to find an authorial voice. But in screenplays, there's neutrality; you're describing some other reality in objective terms. I find that form especially liberating because of the way in which I write. I try to leave a lot of things out, and I try to leave a lot of things for the actor. The *Dunkirk* script is very short and has very little dialogue relative to my other films. I try to write a skeleton with a structure and write the bones of it, but I invite people in and collaborate. On the *Dark Knight* films, Jonathan and I were in the closest collaboration. I would drag him around the world, scouting locations, writing in cars, aeroplanes or wherever it took to get it done as we were mounting production. I wrote the scripts for *Following* and *Inception* on my own. I've done it both ways.

Dunkirk is one of the great stories of human history, and it works its way into pop culture in all kinds of ways.

We usually get in the room, throw a few things around, and then one of us will be writing a draft on our own and, later, passing the ball back and forth. That was particularly the case with *The Prestige* and *Interstellar*; he wrote drafts for years and later I worked on them. With us, in a funny sort of way, the process winds up being much the same because I always have him read the stuff I'm doing and we're always talking. I just don't pay him. [*laughs*]

PLAYBOY: What was it like at home for you, with a father who worked in marketing and a mother who was a flight attendant?

NOLAN: We grew up in England and America at different times, but mostly England. My dad ran his own business in product development for many years. He started out as a copywriter and was a very creative man. I wanted to make my own movies, and when I was about seven, he lent me his Super 8 camera, which at the time was as expensive as a high-end video camera of today. I literally taped it to the bottom of our car and smashed it to bits. He wasn't thrilled, but he was very encouraging creatively. My mom was a flight attendant right out of college for a few years. When she met my dad and got married, she was forced to retire, because back in the day, they wanted flight attendants to be young and single. When there was a class-action lawsuit that was eventually resolved in the 1980s, they had to offer her her old job back, 20 years later, with seniority. In the meantime, she'd been teaching English as a second language, adult literacy programs and so forth and made a real career out of it.

PLAYBOY: How was it that you lived in both London and the US?

NOLAN: Because my mom is American, we'd go back there to see her family in the summer when I was young. The way film distribution was in those days, in the summer we would see all the movies that wouldn't come to England until Christmas. My dad and I first saw *Star Wars* at a suburban movie theater in Ohio or something, and I have a very vivid memory of being seven and on the first day of school in England in September of 1977 trying to explain *Star Wars* to people: "Well, there's a bad guy who's got a mask and then there's these bad guys who have white suits and they look like robots but not really." I was the first guy in school to see it. It made a huge impression on me, and my dad took me to see it again in London when it opened in 70mm at the Dominion Theatre on Tottenham Court Road. I remember going to see *2001: A Space Odyssey* with him at the Leicester Square Theatre, which has since been knocked down. *Interstellar* was the last film to play there.

PLAYBOY: Were you and Jonathan as close as you are now?

NOLAN: I was off at boarding school, so I was sort of the outsider. I don't want to talk too much about our upbringing just because I don't want to speak for my brother. Jonathan is six years younger than I am. As we've gotten older, we've gotten closer, and closer as well as with the creative collaboration that started very much with *Memento*.

PLAYBOY: As a kid, what inspired you? What posters did you have on your walls? What did you collect?

NOLAN: The seminal influence was Ridley Scott and his movies. At some point, after seeing *Blade Runner*, I had somehow connected it with *Alien* — everything's completely different, but there's the same feeling. That was my first sense of what

a director does. I can't tell you how many times I've seen *Blade Runner*. I know everything about it. I was absolutely obsessive about it, and at a time when there weren't many people interested in it outside of a small group. I remember talking to my dad about Ridley Scott and him revealing that he'd actually worked with him and knew him a tiny bit because of where he produced some of his commercials. Ridley Scott was my hero.

There was a place in Soho called Vintage Magazine Shop where I would buy black-and-white stills from *Casablanca*, *Diva*, *Blade Runner* and put them on the wall in my room. It was the 1980s, when I was entering into what I call an open phase of really wanting to absorb new things, new culture, new music, new movies.

PLAYBOY: Did you persuade your father to try to find a way to meet Ridley Scott, or did you ever write him or anyone else a fan letter?

NOLAN: I used to think about doing that a lot. I'm just too shy, too self-conscious. I didn't ever do that, and part of me now wishes I had. I was at a party once, and Sydney Pollack was across the room, not really talking to anybody. I had spoken to him on the phone once but had never met him in person. I thought, I should go talk to him. I didn't. He passed away fairly soon after.

PLAYBOY: Were you also shy around women growing up?

NOLAN: I don't really want to answer that other than to say Emma and I met on our very first day at University College London.

PLAYBOY: Did you two share a class or just meet randomly?

NOLAN: Same dorm — "dorm" in the American vernacular, "hall of residence" in the British. We met the first night. I don't think I should say anymore on that.

PLAYBOY: Both personally and professionally, yours is a long-lasting and productive relationship.

NOLAN: I had a very nice conversation with my 13-year-old son about colleges, and he said, "When you went to college, did you know anyone?" I said, "No, I sat in my room in my hall of residence the first night and heard a bit of a party going on in the corridor. I thought, I don't know anyone, I'd better get out there and say hi." I opened the door and, as I said to my son, "Who was the first person you think I saw?" Emma.

PLAYBOY: Lucky you left your dorm room.

NOLAN: I would not have on most nights, but it was the first night. I'm very glad that I did. Emma and I ran the great film society at University College London.

PLAYBOY: Did you have similar taste in films?

NOLAN: It wasn't that. I sort of drew Emma into production right away. In the film society they'd give you a roll of reversal film, and you could shoot a 16mm movie and edit it on their Steenbeck editing machines. I drew her into helping on the films I made there.

PLAYBOY: Including your 1989 Super 8 short *Tarantella*, which was shown on a PBS showcase for indie projects. Your 1996 film *Larceny* showed to acclaim at the Cambridge Film Festival. After college, you funded, directed and shot with friends your first feature, *Following*, which got noticed at film festivals and was reviewed by *The New York Times*.

The Spitfire is the most magnificent machine ever built. There's just a grin on your face from takeoff to landing.

NOLAN: As the films get bigger and more involved and longer, Emma has always been there helping out in whatever way makes the most sense. She's developed an extraordinary ability to understand all sides of the filmmaking process from the ground up in a way that few people who meet her would necessarily see. She knows more than any producer about how films are actually put together. She's very self-effacing and doesn't talk a lot about what she knows. She allows people to sit and lecture her until it's to the point where she has to point out, quietly, politely, that she knows what she's talking about.

PLAYBOY: What kinds of movies do you like to see as a family?

NOLAN: We have a very good projector here at the house. I've shown our four kids movies since they were a very young age. They've watched the silent version of *Ben Hur*, and they all wound up seeing 2001 for the first time when they were three or four years old. I've run *Blade Runner* just once because it's a little more grown-up and the kids are spread out in age. I showed them *Citizen Kane* when they were pretty young, and they still complain about it. They know that it winds me up to complain about *Citizen Kane*. They know a lot about movies and have a good grounding in film history. I did have an awful moment when I said, "Maybe they're all going to be film critics."

PLAYBOY: Because you and your wife work so closely together in a high-pressure environment, how do you strike a balance?

NOLAN: The crossover in our professional and personal lives is very much two halves: the half of our lives before kids and the half afterwards. Once kids come along, they ground you. You have to put things to one side at some point. You have to be living a family life and shutting off the work life. Emma has always been very good at asserting that discipline at the appropriate moment, even though we're living and breathing what we do all the time. We're also engaging the kids in that and take them on location wherever we go. But Emma has always been great at seeing the need to put work to one side and concentrate on family at the appropriate time.

PLAYBOY: What's on the docket pst- *Dunkirk*?

NOLAN: I've never been good at doing more than one thing at a time. For me, *Dunkirk* won't be finished until it goes out in the world.

PLAYBOY: Are you still tempted by the prospect of doing your own James Bond or *Star Wars* movie?

NOLAN: A Bond movie, definitely. I've spoken to the producers Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson over the years. I deeply love the character, and I'm always excited to see what they do with it. Maybe one day that would work out. You'd have to be needed, if you know what I mean. It has to need reinvention; it has to need *you*. And they're getting along very well.

PLAYBOY: So is it a good time to be Christopher Nolan?

NOLAN: It feels great, even though this is the scary period, when I've done the things I can to make *Dunkirk* the most it can be. You get obsessed and pour yourself into the technical finishing of it because it's your last chance to make things as good as they can be. Now comes the period of putting the film out there in the world. That never gets any easier.

Alena
Senatorova
OLGA TETEREVYATNIKOVA
ALENA MIL
KSENIYA MISHKINA
produced by OLGA IVANOVA & NI
ROV

KING
KING

The international Miss Europe 2017 contest was recently held in Seoul South Korea where representatives of 35 countries fought for the title of first beauty

Playboy covers the number one runner up of Miss Europe 2017 Alena Senatorova She was born in Russia and as a child her family moved to Germany where she graduated from high school and studied economics Alena began working in the modeling business from the age of 17 and has been living in Dubai for 2 years and proudly calls the Emirates her new home Since her arrival in the Emirates she began working with well known UAE modeling agencies like MMG Models, Bareface and others Miss Europe 2017 was not her first contest, she's already participated in another international beauty contest Miss Asian Pacific World Contest 2012 where she took fourth place

Besides modeling this young resident of the Emirates also enjoys psychology and life coaching which takes up a lot of Alena's time In addition she's an avid rescuer of lost and stray animals and regularly helps veterinary clinics by contributing money to various operations for abandoned homeless animals

To date, the Miss Europe contest is considered the oldest beauty contest in the world and one of the most prestigious as its winners receive the best modeling contracts and the opportunity to be special guests at some of the biggest film festivals and red carpet events around the world and much more

WICKED!

ЕМИЯ БОКСА
BOXING ACADEMY
БОКСА
BOXING ACADEMY

АКАДЕМИЯ БОКСА
БОКСА

FASHION JIU-JITSU BALMAIN REAL BOXING EVERLAST MUAY THAI KING REEBOK EXCALIBUR DRESS ABSPACE BANG WISHING ON A STAR THEORY OYSHO NIKE MACHOMA TOP KING BOXING LOCATION THE BOXING ACADEMY IN MOSCOW

АКАДЕМИЯ БОКСА
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АКАДЕМИЯ БОКСА
BLASTER
KIN

PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

A man's number one question when he visits a nude beach for the first time: What should I do if I get an erection? The number two question: Why are there so many dudes here?

My trust issues began when I discovered there was no donkey in Donkey Kong.

The Heimlich Manoeuvre means some - thing totally different to anyone who ever slept with Dr Henry Heimlich.

If your lawyer has an AOL e-mail address, you're going to jail.

One way to get a hand job is to become a sculptor.

Never trust a psychic wearing a Band-Aid. They should have seen that shit coming.

Instead of "Who's your daddy?" I accidentally said, "How's your daddy?"

We put our clothes back on and discussed her father's hip surgery. When baseball players want to delay ejaculation, do they think about people having sex?

I accidentally texted a picture of my penis to my grandma. She asked me when I shaved my head and lost an eye.

Sometimes just to switch things up I ask my therapist how my lack of progress makes her feel.

Those of you who think the Earth is flat, show some decency. Some planets just take longer than others to develop.

Attendance at the Rodeo Hall of Fame has skyrocketed since it dedicated a statue to the reverse cowgirl.

Caller: Sir, we believe your identity has been stolen. Me: I go to sleep at nine P.M. and drive a minivan. I'm sure they'll give it back.

If eating chocolate makes your brain simulate the feeling of being in love, how many pieces does it take to convince your girlfriend to try anal? I took the batteries out of the carbon monoxide alarm because the loud beeping was making me feel sick and dizzy.

Kids today will never know the awkwardness of having to meet up with an ex to give them their CDs back.

Sometimes when I'm driving I'm overcome with an urge to plough into an overpass pillar. Anyway, my name is Dave and I'll be your Uber driver.

A job interview is like a first date. You dress up, pretend to be someone else and spend the whole time wondering if you're going to get screwed.

At the end of the day, life should ask us, "Do you want to save the changes?"

The doctor said I should be drinking more whisky. Also, I'm calling myself "the doctor" now.

Sure, having sex is a great workout, but having sex on a Bowflex is the ultimate workout.

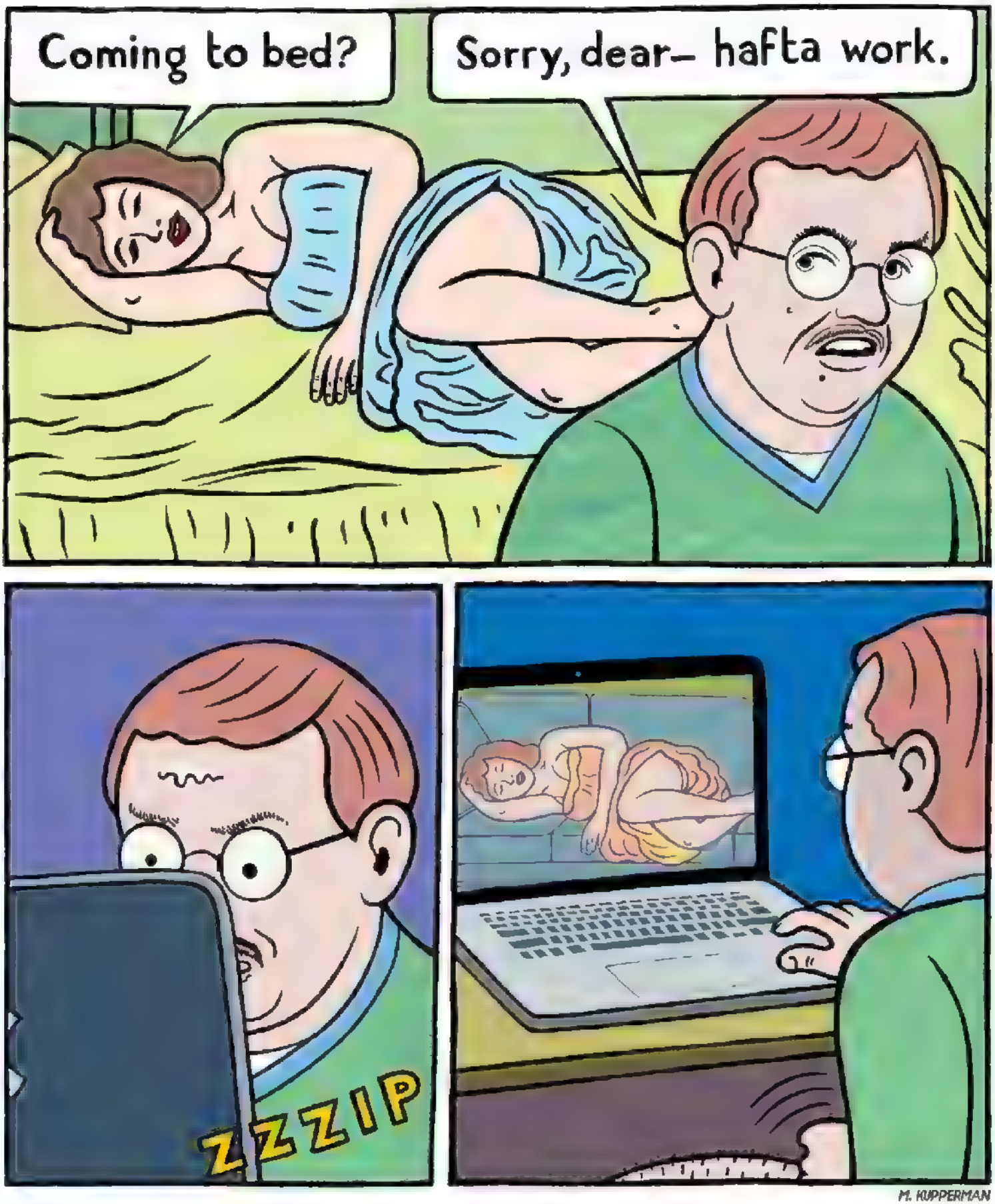
For most guys, having sex on the beach is like watching La La Land. It's over quickly, it's a little overrated, and it's embarrassing to be caught doing it by yourself.

Love doll is a pretty optimistic term for something you have sex with and then hide in your closet.

Relationship status: intentionally leaving stuff in my pockets as I go through airport security.

I didn't sign up for the 401k at work because there's no way I can run that far.

Summertime sex can be sweaty, sticky and exhausting. . if you're doing it right.


Coming to bed?
Sorry, dear– hafta work.
ZZZIP
M. KUPPERMAN

ALISON BRIE

This summer, the pint size powerhouse plays both a permed wrestler and a profane nun. Read on as she plys her razor sharp wit on wrestling moves, nude scenes and cat cafés

BY **DAVID HOCHMAN** *PHOTOGRAPHY BY* **STEPHAN WÜRTH**

Q1: *You've been in the business for more than a decade. What surprises you most about the way Hollywood works?*

BRIE: I guess it's that everybody cheats on their husbands and wives. It always burns me out. I mean, it makes sense on some level because there's such an immediate intimacy to what actors do. You shoot scenes with people where you're falling in love with them or making out with them or pretending to have sex with them. So I understand. And you can be away from your loved one for months at a time, and hackers are making it more and more difficult to send sexy photos to one another, so what are you going to do? But it still really shocks me.

Q2: *You recently married Dave Franco. What was it like meeting his brother James and the rest of the Francos for the first time?*

BRIE: Well, I met their mom before I met anyone else in the family, and she is so wonderful and sweet that our joke for a long time — and it's true — is that Davey's mom and I said "I love you" to each other before he and I had said "I love you." The Francos are just a very humble, laid-back, close-knit family, and my family has a similar vibe.

Q3: *You've described your parents as reformed hippies. Was there a lot of herbal medicine around when you were growing up?*

BRIE: Well, there's still a lot of pot. On Thanksgiving we all smoke tons of weed. I mean, not tons of weed, we go through phases. Some Thanksgivings I'll bring a pot brownie and we'll be sneaking into the closet and having bites of it. At this last Thanksgiving, it was just my parents and my sister and then a bunch of our friends out back with vape pens. It's been fun introducing my parents to the new weed technology. They both have their pot cards now, though. I used to be the keeper of the weed, now they're on their own.

Q4: *In your new Netflix comedy, GLOW, you play a 1980s pro wrestler. What's your killer move?*

BRIE: We did wrestling training for four and a half weeks for the show, working 10 to 14 hours a day on not killing ourselves. The hardest move is a basic back bump, which is any time you fall on your back onto the mat. You get back-bumped whenever you're clotheslined, which is when you run into someone's arm and fall backwards. I would much prefer to be body slammed than clotheslined, even though someone's lifting you off the ground and slamming you down. At least they're sort of helping to place you in a good position.

My favourite move is the suplex. It's when you have someone in a headlock and you put your head under their arm and then flip them all the way over, and you both back-bump on the mat. With all wrestling moves, you learn the foundation and then you have to just go for it. There's no in-between. You have to trust that you know how to do it.

Q5: *What did you make of all those high-waisted jeans and Amish-looking dresses?*

BRIE: I feel like women's fashion in the 1980s was about women entering the workplace and trying to hold their own with men. They wanted to wear outfits that made them sort of look like men, so they wore clothes that gave them these big shoulders, making their body shape totally different. And they cinched the waist, making them big on their bottom half too. The hair was huge. There was a lot of makeup. It's like everything was an attempt to make yourself bigger.

Q6: *You get naked in the first episode of GLOW. Did you train for that too?*

BRIE: Oh absolutely. I definitely did some push-ups and sit-ups in my room to pump up the right muscles beforehand. I've passed on a lot of projects that had nudity, but I was obsessed with getting GLOW. Nudity is a part of the show, and I had no hesitation. I love the character. I understood why they wanted it. Getting naked on camera is like ripping off a Band-Aid. The hardest part is the transition from being in your robe to being naked on set. Once I was naked, it kind of reminded me of my nudist days from college and that feeling of, Oh yeah, I love my body and this is fun and silly and it's fine.

Q7: *Your nudist days from college?*

BRIE: Cal Arts was sort of clothing optional. I don't know what it's like now; even in the four years I was there, they had started to crack down. My freshman year, the Erotic Ball was still happening. Everybody was in different states of undress. There were tents with TVs playing pornography. And I seem to remember a live sex performance. Mostly it was a lot of lingerie and body paint. I wore this Victoria's Secret thing with a little black thong under a black lace long-sleeved mini-dress. It was see-through lace — you could see the panties — but also long-sleeved because, you know, I'm very demure.

Q8: *Now, in The Little Hours, you play a raunchy nun who smokes and says "fuck" a lot. How was it donning the habit?*

BRIE: The movie is a comedy, but wearing the habit was pure depression. It robs you of any sexual identity, and it is the least sexual thing you can do, though people do have nun fetishes. The part that goes on your head is heavy and pulls your neck back, so I was getting neck cramps every day. But the movie is pretty boundary-less when it comes to comedy, which I love. There's a big scene with a lot of naked witches dancing in the woods around a fire, and that's kind of madness. I think I felt the most guilt when we were shooting a scene where we're yelling at the grounds-keeper, and we were all sort of unleashed. A lot of the movie is improvised, and at the encouragement of our director, we kept calling him a dirty Jew and referred to him stealing like a little Jewish rat. Being Jewish, I just kept thinking, Oh my God, my mom's going to see this.

Q9: *Who makes you laugh the most these days?*

BRIE: Kristen Wiig, always. And Nick Kroll. I pull up clips from the Kroll Show and I just die. The other day I was referencing "Pleep Ploop," a sketch on the Kroll Show; it's a parody of The X Factor, and it's one of my favourites. I also like to listen to The Last Podcast on the Left with Ben Kissel, Henry Zebrowski and Marcus Parks. They talk a lot about serial killers and their histories. They make jokes about and do impressions of the killers. You kind of have to be into their sense of humour.

Oh, and anything with cats. We have two cats, Harry and Arturo. My brother-in-law named them because they originally belonged to him. We often film our cats — mostly doing nothing — and send the videos to each other throughout the day. That is certainly something that other people do not find entertaining.

Q10: *You had a long stint playing Trudy Campbell on Mad Men. Were you surprised by how successful the show became?*

BRIE: I remember watching the Mad Men pilot, which I wasn't in, after I had shot maybe one episode. I remember thinking, Oh my God, there's no way this is going to last on TV. I was kind of like, Well, at least it's really good and I'm in the first season and that'll be great. You never know.

Q11: *You're also known for your work on Community. Do you have a favourite Chevy Chase story?*

BRIE: Oh jeez. A classic Chevy Chase moment is him walking into a room with the rest of the cast, making jokes. Donald Glover is doing a bit. Everyone's cracking up, and Chevy points at Donald and says, "That's not funny. This is funny." And then throws himself over the back of a chair, leaving everyone sort of stunned. Chevy definitely has a set idea in his mind about what comedy is, and maybe it hasn't changed in a long time, but he's still game for anything.

Q12: *You started your career as a children's party clown. How often did the dads hit on you?*

BRIE: Not much when I was a clown, but definitely when I was a Powerpuff Girl, because the costume was very revealing for a children's party costume. It was this tiny dress — shockingly short — with a giant head that strapped on. I kind of couldn't get a feel for what was going on around me, but I knew I was being ogled.

Q13: *Your first real acting gig was a role on Hannah Montana, correct?*

BRIE: Yeah. The show hadn't even aired yet, so nobody knew who Miley Cyrus was. I didn't know who she was. Even at the first table read, I remember seeing Billy Ray Cyrus and wondering, Why is he on the show? What is happening? Miley was super sweet — a sweet, goofy teenager. I don't think she would remember me now, but I'm still a big fan.

Q14: *Back to ogling. Do you know there's a Tumblr account devoted to your breasts?*

BRIE: There's a fascination I can't really explain. My mom was the first one to point that out early in my Community days. She was like, "I was reading a bunch of message boards, and people seem very fascinated by your boobs. I don't know why. They're not that big." I was like, "Mom, I have great boo-

I'VE NEVER FELT SO MUCH ADRENALINE IN MY BODY. WITH AN AUDIENCE THERE, YOU'RE INVINCIBLE.

bs. How dare you?" It's humorous to me that people have had a fixation with my boobs. By the time I'm ready to film a full-nude scene, I am the most muscular I've ever been and my boobs are the smallest they've ever been. It's sort of like a fuck-you to the boob-fetish people.

Q15: *You also have a following of foot fetishists. How do you figure that happened?*

BRIE: I understand why people like my feet, because I do find them to be very cute. But I can't totally make the leap to sexualizing them. People constantly request photos of my feet, and they also send me photos of my feet when I've worn minimal heels or have gone barefoot. Somebody explained to me that it's because feet are the only part of your body that you can't change or alter, so it's really you. I found that to be quite beautiful. But then your mind just cuts to someone jerking off on their feet, and that image is ingrained in your mind forever. Why would you put your dick between two feet when you could put it in a warm vagina or a butthole?

Q16: *Well said. If you could work with anyone in showbiz, who would it be?*

BRIE: Quentin Tarantino, definitely. His movies have been such a big influence on everything I like about filmmaking. I saw Pulp Fiction at way too young an age — my dad would stand in front of the screen during the gimp scene. Then in high school I was obsessed with Reservoir Dogs. And then in college it was Kill Bill Vol. 1 and Vol. 2. The music, the humour — it's just so much fun.

Q17: *This is the Adventure Issue. What's on your adventure to do list?*

BRIE: I want to jump out of an aeroplane. I want to go to Japan because it has amazing cat cafés and other things that I hear are great. What else? Win an Academy Award. That's about it.

Q18: *What is the most adrenaline pumping, death defying thing you've ever done?*

BRIE: Probably wrestling. I mean, I've never felt so much adrenaline in my body, and like I said, you have to literally dive headfirst into some of these moves. With an audience there, you feel nothing. You're invincible. It's a real rush. If GLOW is able to stay on for a few more years I would be ecstatic, because shooting it is the best.

Q19: *And finally, what's the most regrettable part you've taken on?*

BRIE: I mean, I hate to shit on movies and stuff that I've done, but I played the lead in a B horror movie called Born. The entertainment value is high, but people will watch it because I'm in it and say, "Why did you do that to me?" I play this character who gets sort of ...it's implied that she's raped by a demon and impregnated with this demon fetus. So it's like Rosemary's Baby, but then she gets possessed by the demon fetus and murders people and eats their body parts.

I was right out of college, it was my first movie, and I was going to be the lead. I think I actually got a kick out of the heightened drama — the fact that I was coming out of theatre school to play this part where there are actual scenes of me talking to myself and fighting myself because I'm possessed by a demon fetus.

Q20: *And all the while you're like, "What's my motivation here?"*

BRIE: No, I was like, "I got this." I was super cocky. ■

She Got Away

Incidents, accidents, surprises and demises
Cheryl's in over her head dealing with a family emergency

By A.M. HOMES

When her sister, Abigail, called her at college and said, "You need to come home", Cheryl asked, "Is this for real?"

"Yes", Abigail said.

"Can I talk to Mom?"

"No." "Is it Mom?"

"I don't know", Abigail said.

"What does that mean, you don't know; it sounds like you're not telling."

"I really don't know", Abigail said. "You know how Mom always puts herself in the middle of things." Abigail paused. "And bring good clothes."

"You're scaring me", Cheryl said. "Should I be scared? No one in LA wears good clothes unless..."

"I don't know", Abigail said again, "just come home."

Abigail had done this before. The summer Cheryl was 13, Abigail made her come home from sleepaway camp. Their parents had gone to Europe; Abigail stayed behind; she was 17 and supposed to be in summer school.

It was six months after their younger brother, Billy, died while they were visiting their grandparents in Arizona. Billy told them that a poisonous snake had bitten him; "Put a cold washcloth on it", they said, and then he was dead.

"I need you to come home", Abigail had said.

"Did the plane crash?" Cheryl asked.

"What plane?"

"The plane Mom and Dad were on?"

"No", she said.

"I thought maybe it did, because you told camp it was an emergency. The camp director came and got me out of the lake."

"Sorry", she said, "I thought I told them you could call me back."

"You told them you'd hold on." Cheryl was standing on the porch of the camp office in a dripping wet bathing suit. She was talking on a phone with a long yellow curly cord that had been passed through the open window. She used the drops from her wetsuit to spell her initials on the wooden porch.

"Where are you?" Cheryl asked.

"I don't know", Abigail said. "I'm lost."

"What do you see around you?"

"Eyeshadow", she said.

"Are you in your room?" Cheryl asked.

"Come home", Abigail said.

"I'm in the camp play and the talent show", Cheryl said. "This week there's a bunk cookout, an overnight adventure and it's my turn to be the baker's assistant. Plus, I'm in the bugle corps, I play reveille."

"Don't make me beg", Abigail said. When they were young, Abigail was a fairy. She wore white wings everywhere she went. She didn't like to answer questions, didn't like to be pinned down.

Their mother joked that she drank too much coffee when she was pregnant with Abigail. "It wasn't the coffee; it was the pills, diet pills", their father said.

"The doctor gave them to me", their mother said.

"What kind of doctor wants a pregnant woman to lose weight?" their father asked.

"A Beverly Hills doctor." Cheryl packed her footlocker and said good-bye to her bunk-mates.

When she got home there was a huge sign, drawn in red lipstick on a white sheet, hanging between the telephone poles. "WELCOME HOME BABY SISTER."

And Abigail was very thin. "Have you stopped eating?" It probably shouldn't have been the first thing Cheryl asked, but it was.

"I've been picking at things, there wasn't much left."

They went outside and looked at the "edible" garden where the swing set used to be — their parents planted it to encourage Abigail to take an active role in her own nutrition. Most of the plants were dead.

"You have to water it", Cheryl said.

Abigail shrugged. "I have trouble with things that are so needy."

They set up in Billy's bedroom and talked about how weird it was that no one talked about anything. Abigail was the keeper of the feelings, she hung on to everything. Their mother used to say, "You wear your feelings like jewellery."

When they were young, Abigail was afraid of floating away. She was so worried that she might simply vanish that she literally wanted to be tethered to another person.

First, they used some old laundry line, then climbing rope and carabiners, until they discovered the small weights that you use to keep helium balloons down. Abigail kept them in her pockets — a big help.

And for a while, she was better; she married — Burton Wills, her plastic surgeon — but she also kept her room at home, not like an office but like how it was when she was a kid. Burton didn't seem to mind.

• • •

For Cheryl this time, coming home from school in Minneapolis, felt even more difficult. On the way from the airport to the house the car passed a field of oil pumps in the middle of nowhere, milking the earth, which already looked decimated, barely able to feed scrub brush and the occasional sage bush. All of it felt entirely different, alien.

"How did you pick Minneapolis?" Cheryl's friends from high school had asked. "We never heard of it before."

"I wanted to go to the most normal place I could find. It's where Charles M Schulz grew up."

As soon as she arrives at the house, Cheryl walks right through it. She passes through the living room and steps outside; the pool is an inky black wishing well — no toys, only a floating sensor. The view is limitless, all of Los Angeles is spread out below. She takes off her shoes and dips her toes in — hot. The heat is like a physical lozenge, a sedative. There is no edge — she has no body, there are no boundaries, she, the water and the air all are one.

She used to stay out there at night, lingering in the darkness. Her father would come and get her out of the pool. "It's a wonder you don't just shrivel up", he'd say. The pool felt safe, she could hide there — invisible. She takes her feet out of the water and goes back into the house. Her wet footprints evaporate behind her, vanishing as she walks.

"Where are you?" she texts her sister.

"In traffic", Abigail texts back.

The accountant who lives next door comes out onto his deck, his hair is longer and he now has breasts. He waves. She waves back.

"Where's Esmeralda?"

"She's driving the car."

Twenty minutes later, she hears the engine turn off and suddenly she's afraid, flushed with the feeling that this is the before — the end of the familiar. She hears the front door open and close. She stays put, or it's more like she can't move, she's immobile on the lounge chair by the pool.

Abigail comes out onto the patio, so thin that she actually looks flat. Her arms and legs are white like copy paper. The only thing normal about her are her feet, jutting out in sandals with red nail polish that catches the light like safety reflectors.

"Should we go inside?" Abigail asks.

"Here is good", Cheryl says, still paralysed.

"We need to talk." Esmeralda brings glasses of water with lemon and a plate of carrot and celery sticks.

"Is it that bad?" Cheryl asks, looking at Esmeralda for confirmation.

Esmeralda makes a face, she doesn't want to be the one to say so, but yes.

Esmeralda has been with them since before Billy was born. She was the baby nurse, the nanny and then the housekeeper, and now Esmeralda does everything for them because apparently they can't do it for themselves, or maybe it's just been so long that they've forgotten how.

Abigail drinks. Cheryl eats. Amid the hyperconsciousness about food, the threat of starvation, she overeats, having not one or two sticks but the entire plate.

"Is it Dad?" she asks.

"It's Mom and Dad", Abigail says.

"Are they getting a divorce?"

"No."

"I don't understand."

"It was Dad and then it was Mom."

"Can you just tell me what happened?"

"Dad was at work. He had an incident."

"Like an occurrence?"

"An episode." "Like a crime show?"

"Like a problem", she said.

"When did this happen?"

"Last Wednesday?"

"And why did no one call me?"

"We wanted to see what happened. We hoped there would be a turnaround. There was nothing you could have done."

Esmeralda gives her a hug, "I'm sorry."

I could have prayed, Cheryl says softly to herself. She prays every day; something she's never told anyone. "So, where's Mom?"

"She's at Cedars too."

"Did you tell her I was coming home?"

"I told her", Abigail says; her voice sounds odd.

"What?"

"Mom was at the salon, she had cucumbers on her eyes, was eating almonds, you know how she does—"

"Fifteen almonds a day."

"And you know how she has so much filler and Botox and everything."

Cheryl nods, "Yes. And she doesn't even like the way it makes her look, she just does it because that's what people here do."

Abigail, who has also had all the filler and Botox, nods back. She doesn't smile or frown because she can't. "Well, somehow a peanut got in. She blew up and no one noticed because her lips are already so puffy—they didn't get bigger on the outside, she puffed up inside."

"And?"

"She's not 'at' Cedars, she's 'in' Cedars."

"In the same room?"

She shakes her head. "They're heavily sedated and on ventilators."

"Will they wake up?"

"No one knows. She was seriously oxygen-deprived."

"This is like a nightmare."

"That's why I called you."

"It's like the nightmare where I'm trying to tell everyone something is wrong and no one can hear me. It's like a zombie apocalypse", Cheryl says. Abigail puts her arms around her. They are so thin and ropy that it's like being encircled by Twizzlers.

"I called Walter", Abigail says.

"My Walter?"

Walter is her best friend from childhood, pre-childhood—infancy. "I thought he might be helpful. He said he'd come over later. Should we go to the hospital?" Abigail asks.

"Should we bring her a plant?" Cheryl asks. "Mom always liked African violets."

Cheryl marches into the house, takes the African violet off the windowsill in the kitchen, clutching it for comfort.

Their father is in the Neuro Intensive Care Unit. He has what looks like a turkey thermometer stuck deep into his head.

"Is that like a pop-up timer?" she asks.

"It tells us the pressure in his head", the nurse says.

"Is it permanent?"

"You'll have to speak with the doctor", the nurse says, exiting the room.

"He looks terrible", Cheryl says. "He would never wear a shirt that colour."

"You mean the hospital gown?"

"Can we put on his regular clothes?" Cheryl asks. "Do we need permission?"

"Like we could make him any worse?" Abigail says. She tugs on the front of her father's gown, trying to pull it off him. "He's heavy."

"We could try and lift him", Cheryl says. "Or how about we just put a shirt on top?"

The clothes he was wearing when they brought him in are in a big plastic bag in the closet. Abigail lays the shirt on him and pulls up the sheets, tucking him in. Cheryl takes his shoes to the bottom of the bed and puts them on the ends of his feet, hanging off his toes.

"Better?" Abigail asks.

"He looks awful."

"Maybe it's the medication", Abigail says.

"Maybe it's what's left of him, maybe it's all there is. This is not good", Cheryl says, shaking her head no, no, no as if the repeated motion will set things free. "Not good at all. Can we see Mom? I need to see Mom."

They take the elevator to nine.

"It's me", Cheryl says, squeezing the mother's hand. "Are you in there, Mom?"

"Hard to tell", the nurse's aide says.

"Burton thinks Mom looks good, very relaxed."

"She's unconscious."

Esmeralda rubs the mother's feet. "She always liked me to rub her feet."

Cheryl kisses her mother on the forehead. Her skin is taut, smooth, no wrinkles. "I love you, Mom. Happy Administrative Assistants Day."

"Is it really Administrative Assistants Day?" Abigail asks.

"It said so on my calendar."

"Mom loves a special day."

Cheryl puts the African violet on the ledge, in the sun.

"I know you find it offensive, but I have to eat", Cheryl tells Abigail as they're waiting for the valet to come with the car.

"How about a smoothie — they don't really smell."

They drive to a juice bar. Abigail orders just kale, parsley and cucumber. Esmeralda gets mixed berry acai. Cheryl orders the Kitchen Sink, and while she's waiting she eats some raw vegan cookies. "Do you have soup?" she asks.

"Cheryl, it's 101 degrees outside. There is no soup", Abigail snaps.

As soon as they get back to the house, Cheryl is drenched in aloneness, the cologne of empty, the odor of nothing. Mid-afternoon, she has a pizza delivered — she meets the guy outside, eats the whole thing standing on the other side of the fence and throws the box away out by the kerb in the neighbour's blue recycling bin.

Later, she finds Abigail in her room, sitting on the floor, ruler in one hand, scissors in the other, cutting the pile on her green shag rug like it's blades of grass, one thread at a time. "It should only be an inch and a half — these are two inches." She shakes her head. Cheryl sits on the floor next to her sister. "I won't be okay if they die. That's always been the issue — how alone I feel. I married Burton because he doesn't intrude on my loneliness but at the same time I'm never actually alone."

"I know", Cheryl says.

"I'm trying to be the big sister, the one in charge, but it doesn't come naturally."

"You're doing a great job. What's the plan for later?"

"Later when?" Abigail asks.

"Tonight, tomorrow and all the days after?" she says.

"Burton would be fine with me just staying here", Abigail says, cutting the shag a little more quickly.

Cheryl realises that if Abigail stays, even for one night, it will create a whole new problem. Abigail will move back home and Cheryl will be stuck living there with her — forever.

"That's okay", Cheryl says. "I'm fine to be on my own. Nothing is going to happen to me, all the bad stuff has already happened."

"Is Walter coming over? Did he text you?" Abigail asks.

"Yes."

"And?"

"He asked, 'How bad is it?' 'Bad', I said. 'Big bad?' he asked. 'Supersize', I said."

Esmeralda is ready to go. "I have to make dinner for my family. I'm sorry. I'll bring you leftovers tomorrow, empanadas." Cheryl sends Abigail with her, giving her a hug, then wishing she hadn't; Abigail is like a human Post-it, there's nothing to her — no dimension.

When they leave, Cheryl locks herself in the bathroom — she feels the need for a safe room. She needs to be held, comforted, and in the absence of humans the space between the tub and the towel rack will do. She sits on the floor, not crying, maybe not breathing either.

"I'M TRYING TO TELL EVERYONE SOMETHING'S WRONG. IT'S LIKE A ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE."

She sits on the floor telling herself to let the tile hold her, let the grout be the cement that keeps her whole. She digs her nails into the rubbery vein of caulking along the side of the tub, takes a deep breath and instead of an exhalation out comes a bellowing, puking wail. She sobs hysterically until her phone makes a loud ping. The ping acts like an off switch; the flood stops as suddenly as it started. She abruptly ceases crying and pulls the phone from her pocket; a text from Burton: "Abigail arrived home — do you happen to know, did she eat anything today?"

"She had a smoothie", she types back, wiping mucus from her face.

"Where are you?" Walter texts a little while later.

"I'm hiding", Cheryl writes.

"Where?"

And because she doesn't want to say between the tub and the towels, she gets up, pulls on a swimsuit and a wrap, unlocks the sliding glass doors, goes out to the pool and sits.

"In the backyard", she types. He comes in through the pool gate.

"You remembered the code", she says.

"1-2-3-4. Some things never change."

"Until they do", she says. There's a pause. "You look good — muscly."

"Eating meat again."

"It's really good to see you."

Walter and Cheryl have known each other since before they could sit up. Their mothers took them to Music Together class; he smiled at her and she threw up on him, or so the story goes. "Spit up", she always corrects. "When you're four months old, it's called spit up. I didn't throw up on you until much later."

They grew up together, each other's witness and confidant.

They go into the house. "Should I try and distract you?" Walter asks, digging around the game closet. He takes out the game Operation. She uses the electrified tweezers to extract the wishbone — her favourite part.

"Is this helping?" Walter asks.

"It's certainly matching how strange I feel", she says.

When the game is over, she goes into her parents' bedroom, moves from object to object, touching her mother's things, moisturisers, custom-compounded sun creams made by the dermatologist, tanning sprays.

Walter comes out of the bathroom wearing her father's robe, his arms filled with pill bottles. "Did you know your dad was on all this stuff?"

"I don't think he took all of it all the time", she says.

They play a game of dress-up, of tag, of jumping on the bed, of calling out an event and then diving into the parents' closets to get ready for it.

"Lunch at the club", Walter calls out.

"Awards ceremony", Cheryl says.

"Sylvia", Walter says while wearing the father's tuxedo.

"Ben", she replies in her mother's ball gown. "Where did we go wrong?" she asks.

"We got what we wanted", he says.

"It's like a kinky psychodrama", she says.

"What time period are we in — before or after?" he asks.

"Let's start with before", she says.

They play until they run out of costumes, until they can't think of what else to say except things that are too painful to say, and then they lie down side by side on the parents' bed — dressed for golf. Walter takes Cheryl's hand — they sleep.

Cheryl wakes up at three AM and goes out to look at the moon. Even when it's 100 during the day, Los Angeles gets cold at night. It's like a wine cooler — somewhere between 50 and 55 degrees. The darkness is chalky black, the city below looks smaller, more consolidated than during the day. Through the night, she sees a lava lamp glowing in the neighbour's house. She goes back for a blanket and in her room she finds a book that she loved as a kid, takes it outside along with a flashlight and the blanket and sits by the pool reading, pretending she is in another time.

She remembers reading stories about children playing outside at night, catching fireflies in mayonnaise jars. She found them comforting — until she realised there was no such thing as a mayonnaise jar in their house and there were no fireflies in Los Angeles.

Across the top of the hill, a thin white plume begins to rise — first like steam creating a cloud of its own, then it starts to blossom, filling out the night sky like a balloon on a long narrow string, blooming like a mushroom cloud — are they smoke signals or special effects?

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There are visitors at the hospital.

Carlton, the father's ex-best friend, is the first. "You know that I gave your father his start", he says.

"I know", Cheryl says; this is what Carlton always says.

"I'm the one who encouraged him to go into the law. He wanted to be an actor and I told him, forget it. You're good-looking but you've got no talent. It was me who made it happen, I brought him clients before he had any. As far as I'm concerned, I sent you kids to school, I paid for your mother's face-lifts and, see that bag his pee is going into, I probably paid for that too. And what does he do for me, nothing."

"Carlton", Cheryl says, "is there something we could do that would make you feel better, that would show you how much my father valued your friendship?"

"You see that ring he's wearing, the kind of showy one with the emerald? As much as I don't like jewellery on a man, I always admired that ring."

"It's yours," Cheryl says.

"Do I take it now?"

"Sure", Cheryl says. She has no idea why she's giving this jerk her father's ring, but she's not going to back out now. Carlton picks up her father's hand. "Be careful of the IV", Cheryl says.

"It's swollen", Carlton says, holding her father's hand in his own.

"Yes, he's retaining fluid."

Carlton tries to take the ring off, to spin it from the finger. The ring's not budging. He tries again, yanking the father sufficiently that an alarm bell goes off and the game of tug-of-war has to be suspended until the nurse comes in and resets the machines. The nurse gives Carlton a tube of Surgilube; he greases the finger with a grotesque pumping motion that prompts Cheryl to look away.

"Got it", Carlton announces, exiting with his shiny prize.

"I wish I had better news for you", Abigail says when the agitated movie-star client arrives with his assistant.

"I don't believe it for a minute", the movie star says. "Some people will go to any length not to have to tell me to my face that it's over. If he wants to dump me he should just say so." His voice is loud, recognisable — people stare. "I may be a big baby but it's not like I can't take it."

THE MOVIE STAR TAKES OUT HIS FOUNTAIN PEN AND STABS HER FATHER IN THE FOOT.

"Come in", Cheryl says, ushering him into her father's room — and out of view.

"Holy shit", the movie star says when he sees him. He takes out his fountain pen, the one he likes to use for autographs, and stabs her father in the bottom of his foot. The nib of the pen stays in the flesh when he pulls out and beyond that nothing happens, except ink leaks onto the floor. There is no grimace, no jerking of the leg.

Cheryl pushes the button in the wall, "Nurse, can we have some wipes for a cleanup?"

"I guess I needed closure", the movie star says, plucking the nib like a thorn out of the bottom of her father's foot and departing.

At home, Dr Felt, the mother's shrink, calls repeatedly. He calls and hangs up and then calls again like a stalker. He leaves a series of messages of escalating intensity. "Are you on vacation?" "I can't help but take it personally. Is there something you forgot to tell me?" "Have you no respect for our process?" And finally, "If you don't call me, I'm going to have to release your time — do you know how many people want Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 10 AM? That's prime time, baby." There's a long pause, then, "And you know what, you're really selfish, only a selfish person would behave this way. You're a bitch, a real bitch."

"Do you want me to call him back?" Walter asks when Cheryl plays him the messages.

She thinks of the one time she went to see Dr Felt, who she always suspected was having an affair with her mother. "Do you want a boyfriend?" Dr Felt had asked her. "Yes," she'd said. "Then you need to lose 10 pounds", he said.

"I want to be the one who tells him", she says to Walter as she's dialling. "Hello, Dr Felt, it's Cheryl." There's a pause; he has no idea who she is. "Sylvia's daughter."

"Oh," Dr Felt says, clearly surprised.

She proceeds to tell him what happened to both her mother and her father and when she's finished all Dr Felt says is, "I'll need some kind of official confirmation."

She's stunned. "Like what?"

"A report from the hospital would suffice. It's quite the story you're telling me. In order to believe it, I'll need to see some paperwork."

She snorts — involuntarily.

"I'll say good-bye now — Cheryl", Dr Felt says, pausing before saying her name, like there's

something about it that's bitter on his tongue.

• • •

The hospital schedules a family meeting. The doctor, whose name is embroidered on his long white coat, begins, "The problem with modern medicine is we're able to keep people alive who in any other country would have died within hours of the event. Sometimes we're lucky, but more often we end up here", he pauses. "In the land of difficult decisions."

"I've been doing a neurological stimulation program", Abigail says. "Twice a day for 15 minutes, I tell my father the jokes, read the letter from the White House, and for my mother, I wave her favourite coffee beans under her nose."

"Your parents are not asleep", the doctor says.

"What's the best-case scenario?" Cheryl asks, cutting to the chase.

"That depends on what you're looking for", the doctor says. "Some families hope the patient lives for a very long time, even if it's like a potted plant. And others hope the end comes quickly, peacefully."

"If it was your parent, what would you wish for?" Cheryl asks.

"I would wish I didn't have to make a choice", the doctor says.

Abigail is angry. "I think they're lying", she says. "That's what they say to keep you here. They want you to beg them to keep your loved ones, it's all about getting the business."

"I didn't get that feeling", Cheryl says, and her voice cracks.

"You should get them out of there", Walter says.

"Where would we take them — on vacation?" Cheryl asks. She is not so secretly angry that Walter is leaving tomorrow for a family trip to Croatia.

"Home", Walter says.

The thought had never occurred to her.

"You need to get them out before something worse happens", he says.

"Worse like what?"

"Flesh-eating bacteria. MRSA, gangrene. Before they start cutting off pieces of them."

"Walter is right", Abigail says. "They need to be home."

That night before he leaves, Walter pulls out his wallet.

"I don't need your money", Cheryl says.

He hands her a photograph of her brother, Billy. "It's his class picture from second grade", Walter says. "He gave it to me and I carry it like a talisman, a reminder to trust myself and not let others negate my experience."

"I love you, you asshole", she says, pressing the photo to her heart and hugging him.

"I'll see you soon", Walter says.

It takes a lot of negotiation — lawyers, sign-offs — to get Sylvia and Ben out of the hospital.

"No backsies", one of the hospital administrators says. "If you take them home, you agree to take full responsibility. If something goes wrong, you can't bring them back to us."

"We understand", Cheryl says.

The furniture is moved to the edges of the living room. The carpets are rolled up. Using blue painter's tape, Cheryl and Abigail mark off two large rectangles on the floor indicating where the hospital beds will go. They unfurl a padded fluorescent orange safety mat. "It's antimicrobial", the man from the hospital supply company says.

The beds arrive and the night before their parents come home, Cheryl and Abigail sleep there, pretending it's a special kind of a spa. In the morning a crew brings the heavy equipment, ventilators, IV pumps, stacks of sheets, diapers, an enormous assembly of goods. "Mom would be pleased", Abigail says. "She loves high production values."

The mother and father come home in a convoy of special intensive care ambulances. The nurse comes with them and does the unpacking, the fine-tuning.

It's like having a new baby or a pet; there's a lot of anxiety, wanting to be sure they get it right. Cheryl pushes her father's Barcalounger into the living room and parks it between the hospital beds so the nurse can put her feet up.

The smell of the food one of the nurses brings for lunch upsets Abigail, who first looks pale and then begins to froth, bubbles of saliva beading on her lips. She retches. "Can you say something, please?" she begs Cheryl.

Cheryl goes into the kitchen. "Excuse me." The nurse looks up from her lunch, as if to say, if your request is going to interrupt my meal — that's gonna be a problem.

"Would it be okay if you ate outside?"

"Pardon?" she asks as if deeply offended.

"Is there a medical reason I should eat outside? Our contract says that we are allowed to bring in our own food and be provided with equipment to heat or refrigerate it. I just want to know if there's a medical reason — like do you have an allergy?"

"My sister is sensitive to food odors."

"That's not a medical reason", the nurse says, taking another bite of whatever is in her bowl.

"It's very hard for her to be around food", Cheryl says.

"So?"

"Mental illnesses are medical conditions", Cheryl says.

"Fine, tell her to get a note from the doctor and I'll show it to my supervisor."

Later, Abigail, exhausted, resists going home.

"I promise you", Cheryl says. "Nothing will happen while you're gone."

"You won't leave them alone, will you?"

"I'll be right here."

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Early the next morning Burton shows up; he finds Cheryl outside by the pool. "Where's Abigail?"

"She's home." There's a long pause. "She didn't wake up this morning."

"She'll be over later?" Cheryl asks.

"Her body gave out, her heart stopped."

"What does that mean?"

"It means she's gone. Abigail died."

Cheryl is overcome with the strangest sensation of rising up, levitating, a kind of liberation that feels entirely unfamiliar. She doesn't understand it. Why is this her reaction? Has she been so terrified about what might happen to Abigail that the absence of fear, the absence of the weight is causing her to float away? And is this it? Is this the kind of floating that Abigail was afraid of? Or was that something else?

She looks around — nothing is out of place. Abigail is dead, but still the coffee automatically made itself, the newspapers were delivered, the morning nurse arrived and fed and changed her parents. She got away, she thinks.

"What do you think killed her?" Cheryl asks.

"Malnutrition and a weakening of the heart", Burton says. "The last few weeks were especially difficult."

"She was terrified about being left alone", Cheryl says. There is a long silence.

"What would she have wanted?" Burton asks.

"I don't think she'd like to be in a coffin", Cheryl says. "She would think a coffin made her look fat. She would like to be made as small as possible, to fit inside a pill bottle." She turns to Burton, "Will there be a funeral? And what about the after-bit? I don't think we can do it here at the house, in front of them?"

The funeral is small, Abigail is buried next to their brother in a row of plots the parents bought when Billy died. "They bought more than they needed — in the hopes the family would expand", the funeral director tells Cheryl and Burton.

They stand in their black clothes with their sunglasses on against the bleached sky, the backdrop of the city behind them. Burton, Cheryl and Esmeralda. It's the first time they've left the parents home alone with only a nurse.

On the way home they stop at the one restaurant Abigail loved — Tu Es Moi — and celebrate her life in foams. They have a flight of foams — 15 of them, each one under 10 calories, everything from Thanksgiving Dinner to Salted Caramel Pastrami.

When they get back to the house, Cheryl opens her father's safe, counts out six months' pay and gives it to Esmeralda. "You need a vacation", she says. "Tell me where you want to go and I'll transfer the miles from my father's account."

"It is too much to say goodbye to everybody all at once", Esmeralda says, and begins to cry.

"I know", Cheryl says, comforting her. "But this isn't goodbye, it's just a chance for us to gather ourselves and make sense of things. The fact is, I need to be alone for a little bit."

Esmeralda nods tearfully, "You're all grown up."

The funeral is followed by a Facebook shivah — Cheryl posts a message about Abigail's death, and then the rabbi who married them adds a post, and Cheryl and Burton follow it each evening for seven days by posting a remembrance at sundown. Old friends add memories of their own. And after seven days Cheryl and Burton write a thank you note to everyone and post more photos.

Now that it is just Cheryl and her parents, Cheryl spends more time talking to the nurses, she learns things about her parents, details about their skin, their smells, their habits. They may not be able to communicate — but there are things the body enjoys. The night nurse tells her that her father likes a little pot smoke blown in his face. "His blood pressure goes down, his digestion is better." She nods. The nurse blows a little smoke in her face; she breathes deeply. He does it again. "I've also got edibles if you want some," he says.

On Thursday at three PM when the morning nurse has to leave for her shift in the ER and the three-to-midnight nurse is stuck in traffic coming from Orange County, Cheryl isn't worried. "Not a problem", she says. "It's okay. I can be alone with my parents for an hour. Just go."

The morning nurse leaves, grateful. Cheryl, a little nervous, sits between her parents, and then after a few minutes goes outside.

She is out by the pool when the power goes off. It takes her a few seconds to realise what's happened. There's a peculiar absence of noise. Silence holds the air. The pool pump has stopped, the compressor for the air conditioner is hushed. Cheryl hurries inside; the clock on the microwave is dark, the television screen is flat black. There are high-pitched alarms, squeals like helium balloons coming from the living room. Her first impulse is to call Abigail and then she remembers, there is no more Abigail. She switches the alarms off, turns to her parents and says, "I'm not sure you noticed, but the power went out. We've been having a heat wave, it's probably a rolling blackout. There are backup batteries. You're currently at 95 percent. All is good. I'm just going to step outside for a minute and see if I can learn more."

Cheryl goes out the front door, wanting to confirm that the blackout is not theirs alone. A man in a white hazmat suit is wandering down the middle of the street, swinging what looks like an incense box in front of him, back and forth like a priest at Christmas. "Has anyone seen my queen?" he cries. "My queen has flown away." She realises it's the neighbour. "Stay inside", he shouts. "The swarm is loose." She hears the air buzzing and quickly closes the door.

A MAN IN A HAZMAT SUIT WANDERS THE STREET. "HAS ANYONE SEEN MY QUEEN? THE SWARM IS LOOSE."

She sends Burton a text, but it bounces back. She calls the nurse stuck in traffic from her cell phone but the call doesn't go through. She goes from room to room looking for a landline. In Abigail's closet she finds the powder-blue princess phone. It feels lighter than she remembers a phone feeling. She turns it over—the bottom is covered with duct tape. She peels it off, the insides of the phone have been removed. Four loose joints fall out. She can't reach Walter.

The house gets warmer and starts to smell of urine and shit. Cheryl opens the glass doors. There are birds outside, the sounds of dogs barking, children playing in a pool, a woman talking in the distance.

Meanwhile, the red and green lights blink and the machines continue to breathe for her mom and dad. The IV bags keep dripping. And her parents, Sylvia and Ben, remain unchanged, their bladders emptying into the plastic containers at the end of the beds.

Cheryl keeps thinking she should do something, but there is nothing to be done.

An hour later, as the backup batteries begin to fade, Cheryl gets the favourite book from her childhood, sits in the Barcalounger between her parents and begins to read aloud. When she is done, she takes her father's right hand and her mother's left and draws them to her, holding them close, on her chest, over her heart, praying, waiting. ■

Y'KNOW
I'M BEGINNING TO SUSPECT THAT THIS THING IS JUST A GLORIFIED REGULAR HOLE
WOW!
SLNT

Fighting the real war on FAKE NEWS

A report from the White House Press Room

By **BRIAN J KAREM**

Back in April, on the night of the White House Correspondents' Dinner, a reporter from the United Kingdom turned to his US counterpart and said in a low voice, "The war against us is real"

The American reporter, who had spent countless hours in presidential press briefings, replied, "Try spending time at the White House"

The White House briefing room has seats for 49 and standing room for up to 60 more. Reporters from around the world gather in that room almost every day; nearby, President Donald Trump calls those same reporters enemies of the state. The real fun begins when White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer (at press time, he still holds that title) defends the president while trying to make sense of the man's statements. According to congressmen from both parties and reporters inside the room, Spicer's performance has only highlighted the gap between the appearance the administration wants to project and the facts the president wishes us all to ignore

"We have had a lot of challenges", says Jeff Mason, president of the White House Correspondents' Association. "We've worked hard for the right to do our jobs."

From the beginning, it has been a difficult task. When the president and his chief strategist, Steve Bannon, bash the press, Spicer must back them up while assuring reporters that the president has a "healthy respect for the First Amendment." Asked if he shares his boss's contempt for the press, Spicer says, "I think there's some legitimate reporters who do a good job and a lot who are more interested in perpetuating false narratives than getting the story right."

Seen in a certain light, Spicer has taken steps toward democratising his press room. He often calls on reporters from beyond the first row of national print and television outlets. He has also instituted a Skype video screen so reporters outside the Beltway can get involved. Some critics say that these are merely tools he uses to call on more sympathetic and less-established reporters, to those allegations he says, "There's some people who it will never be enough"

Mason, for one, says the level of openness has been "surprising and encouraging."

But then there are the tweets. Historically, Spicer is in a unique position. His boss bypasses the media by firing off micro-pronouncements laced with vitriol and questionable claims. Spicer's standard response is a koan of evasiveness. "The tweet speaks for itself."

While Spicer's briefings have been compared to the loss of one's virginity (very short, and I didn't enjoy it much), he's not the only one sowing confusion in the press room. He has been hit with asinine and downright bewildering questions, including one about whether the president favoured the Caps or the Rangers in the NHL — on the day the American military dropped the so-called mother of all bombs on Afghanistan. Sometimes it's apparent reporters aren't listening to one another or following up on one another's questions. Some seem more interested in appearing on TV than "seeking factual answers to important questions", as the legendary White House reporter Helen Thomas once said.

But on occasion, the press corps hits on all cylinders, pushing back against an administration that is more antagonistic toward the press than any other president since Richard Nixon. (Nixon's famous line "One can only be angry with those he respects" could be a Trump tweet cleaned up by a high school English teacher.)

On April 19, after it became known that the fleet President Trump had said was steaming for North Korea was actually going in a different direction, Trey Yingst of One America News Network, Kaitlan Collins of the Daily Caller and Jessica Stone from CCTV (now CGTN) asked a series of questions that put Spicer on the ropes. Yingst started out by asking how the administration thought the fleet was "thousands of miles" from its actual location. Spicer sputtered. "The president said we had an armada going toward the peninsula; that's a fact", he said. Stone then asked how the mistake could not be "falsely" encouraging to our allies. Spicer again sputtered, and Collins delivered the knockout blow by reminding Spicer that the fleet wasn't going where the administration had claimed. "Don't you think it's a little misleading?" she asked. "What part is misleading?" Spicer said. Game over. The fact that all three reporters represented upstart news outlets, two of them deep in the political spectrum's red zone, suggests that Spicer's press room is sometimes able to carry out its mandate, despite and because of his best efforts.

Speculation continues as to the man's longevity, particularly after his comparison of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with Hitler. Either way, the president's war against the media goes on, even as pundits call his battle against "fake news" a "fake war"

Meanwhile, Americans are evermore confused as to what is real and what isn't. Such confusion works to the benefit of an administration seeking to make radical changes to health care, the budget, international relations and more. The war in the press room is indeed real and its consequences dire, but there are far bigger battles to fight on the other side of the smokescreen. ■

SIGNIFICA, INSIGNIFICA, STATS AND FACTS

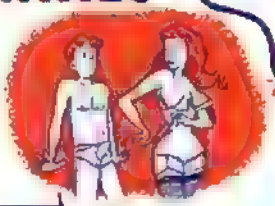
DRAWN DATA

Survey SAYS...

75% of single men and 64% of single women want "more adventure in the bedroom," according to a Match.com poll.

MILLENNIALS

are 48% more likely than people in other age groups to jump into bed with someone to see if they have a connection; 28% say sex is a good way to figure out if they're in love.



POSSIBLY RELATED: 52% OF MILLENNIALS SAY THEY'RE LONELY.

HOT Wax

11 MILLION: number of Americans who bought a new vinyl record in 2016. Those who buy vinyl spend **3 TIMES** the U.S. average on music.

Lady FINGERS NOT INCLUDED

Estimated number of calories in a human head and torso: **5,420**

Liver: **2,570**
Heart: **650**

Honey...

I'M (NOT) HOME

Percentage of 25- to 34-year-old American women who were homeowners in...

1975:	2016:
43	14

Franks AND FIREWORKS

150 MILLION

number of hot dogs Americans consume on Independence Day

NUMBER OF HOT DOGS (WITH BUNS) CONSUMED TO WIN NATHAN'S HOT DOG EATING CONTEST IN:

1996:	2001:	2006:	2011:	2016:
22.25	50	53.75	62	70

Game of SHOWS

3 surprising TV series George R.R. Martin has written for:

MAX HEADROOM, THE TWILIGHT ZONE AND BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

BUT FIRST...

PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS WHO SAY IT'S OKAY TO TAKE A selfie...

at a funeral: **8**
in the bath: **21**
on public transportation: **58**
at a wedding: **65**
at a tourist spot: **88**

HOW LONG?

Percentage of American adults who say they'd be happy to have sex on a first date...

Men: **21**
Women: **6**

Packing HEAT

9: the average number of firearms TSA officers intercept every day. **83%** of the guns are loaded.

THE TSA'S TOP 10 STRANGEST ITEMS FOUND IN 2016:

10. trailer hitch made with inert grenade
9. Hello Kitty gun
8. barbed-wire-wrapped baseball bat
7. golden grenade (inert)
6. replica suicide bomber vest
5. single-blade "finger armor" claw
4. dead sea horses
3. five-bladed flogger
2. bullet-covered gas mask
1. life-size zombie (a movie prop)

VIDEOCRACY

35: average age of American gamers
67: percentage of American households that play video games

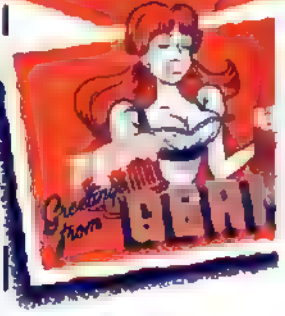
$97,000: average salary in the gaming industry

$12 BILLION: amount gaming contributed to the U.S. GDP in 2016, according to the Entertainment Software Association

Pushing BOUNDARIES

Top five countries for adventurous tourists, as ranked by the Adventure Travel Trade Association:

5. SWITZERLAND
4. NORWAY
3. NEW ZEALAND
2. GERMANY
1. ICELAND



MIXED Business

90+ number of celebrities, athletes, social-media influencers and marketers the FTC sent warning letters to for not clearly disclosing business relationships in their Instagram posts.

Expanding Your SEXUAL FRONTIERS ...a Rough Guide

Take it from an activist, entrepreneur and alt porn icon: Your ticket to Pleasure Town is simple curiosity

We don't have remote controls for our brains (yet), but we do know that novelty raises our dopamine levels and that leaving our comfort zones for areas that feel taboo can trigger the whole thumping-heart, sweating-palms adventure we credit to adrenaline.

In her book Moody Bitches, Dr Julie Holland explains how an increase in dopamine and adrenaline in the body can result in a surge of testosterone, which in turn contributes to sexual arousal. Put simply, investigating the unknown may make you want to have sex more often and can improve the sex you're already having. There's a solid case for developing your sense of sexual curiosity — and I'm here to help.

Novelty is subjective. The space between our boundaries and what we're familiar with is different for each individual. Hence the handy grid on the opposite page: a tip-of-the-iceberg look at the sexual-adventure spectrum, running from private and relatively easy, in the lower-left corner, to more daring, in the upper right. Which quadrant feels most like home? Find your co-ordinates, and then ask yourself if any of the surrounding plot points pique your interest. The seasoned sexual voyager may even discover that the more "vanilla" options are where the real adventure lies. Sometimes a feather is just as powerful as a flogging.

Meanwhile, allow me to share three of my own observations that may help you boldly go where you've never gone before.

Sometimes exploration is simply a matter of being more present in your body. The patches of skin we tend to forget — behind the ears, under the breasts, next to the balls — can be stealth erogenous zones. Watching ASMR videos (see the lower-left quadrant) may give you a pleasurable tingle, and that tingle may become erotically charged. Subtraction works too. Covering your eyes intensifies your awareness of what you smell, hear and feel.

Exploration should be methodical, a process of trouser-parts titration. If you like the idea of having your wrists restrained by your partner's hands, try using some easily escapable thick ribbon; if you enjoy that, dive into handcuffs or advanced rope bondage. Tactile sensations can range from fingertip caresses to the isolated pricks of a Wartenberg wheel to the sharp heat of a single-tail whip. An interest in group sex can lead to a poly munch (i.e., a casual, semi-public gathering dedicated to discussing polyamory rather than practising it) and then to a sex party, where easing into things by first observing is absolutely acceptable.

Perhaps most important, reversing roles can expand your understanding of another person's body. Acting as the recipient if you tend to top — or being inside another person when you're usually the one who is penetrated — can lead to powerful insights into what your partner feels. We all know that a pegging session is worth a thousand think pieces, and that's because physical empathy is a profoundly intimate connection.

If you don't know where to start, ask yourself, What do I want that I have not experienced? Whether it's a tryst with a vibrator, an affair with your old babysitter or something else entirely, listen to your urges and make your fantasies a reality — or as close to it as possible. And if none of these suggestions whets your appetite, look in the gaps between and beyond.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE SEIDLITZ

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN LOWRY

THRILL SEEKER

AT HOME

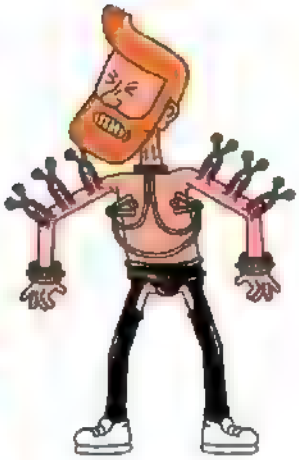
ABROAD

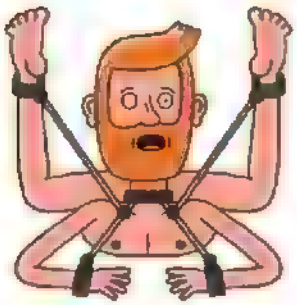
WEEKENDER

Bring in a third partner

Play with pain

Experiment with restraints



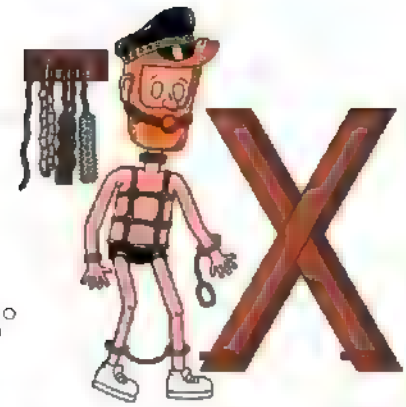


Sexy games

Reverse roles with your partner

Three words
Eyes wide shut

Descend into a dungeon



Check out a live sex show

Take a naked bike ride

Pucker up for a kissing party

Bone up

Attend a poly munch

Head to Hump fest

Take in a burlesque show

Build a mutual fantasy

Find porn that arouses you and your partner

Get a sex toy subscription

Have you tried texting

Explore Tumblr's porn tags

Watch ASMR videos

Read erotic fiction aloud in bed

Sex shop challenge

Make out (and more) in public

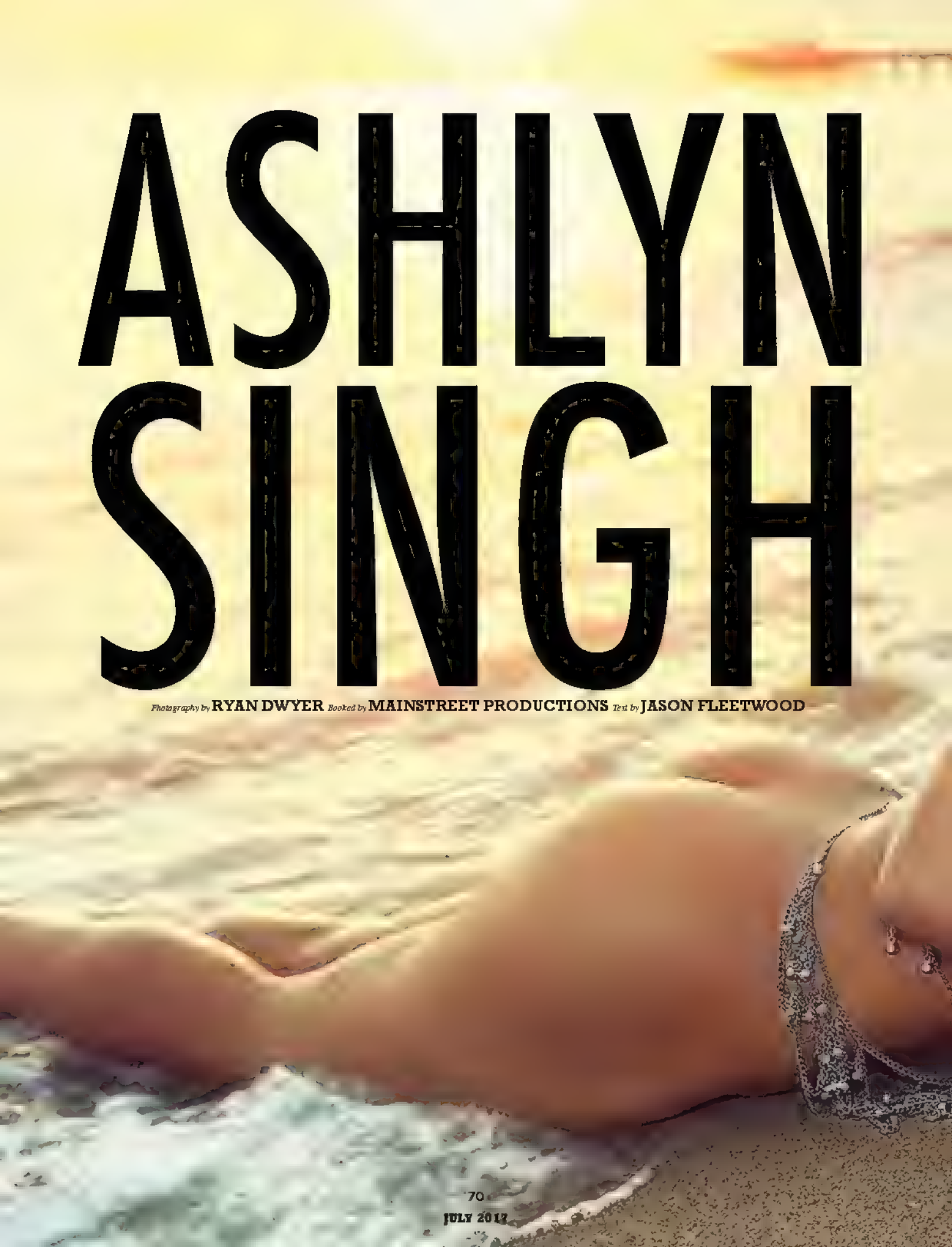
See professional cuddler

Oysters anyone?

1. The cheesier the better — erotic dice, sex bingo, kinky truth or dare. Laughter can be an aphrodisiac. 2. Modern sex stores often have classes on everything from vocalizing desires to learning intricate rope bondage. 3. The improv way: You propose something you find arousing, and the other builds on it. For example: "We're in an alley at night." "Yes, and I'm ..." 4. Set a timer for five minutes. Enter a sex shop. Buy something. Go home and use it.

ASHLYN SINGH

Photography by **RYAN DWYER** *Booked by* **MAINSTREET PRODUCTIONS** *Text by* **JASON FLEETWOOD**



Ashlyn Singh was born in Eugene, Oregon and relocated to Las Vegas as a child which she has made her principle residence for many years. Based on a burning passion to become bilingual she made Cabo San Lucas, Mexico her second home while she studied Spanish and immersed herself in Mexican culture and the language.

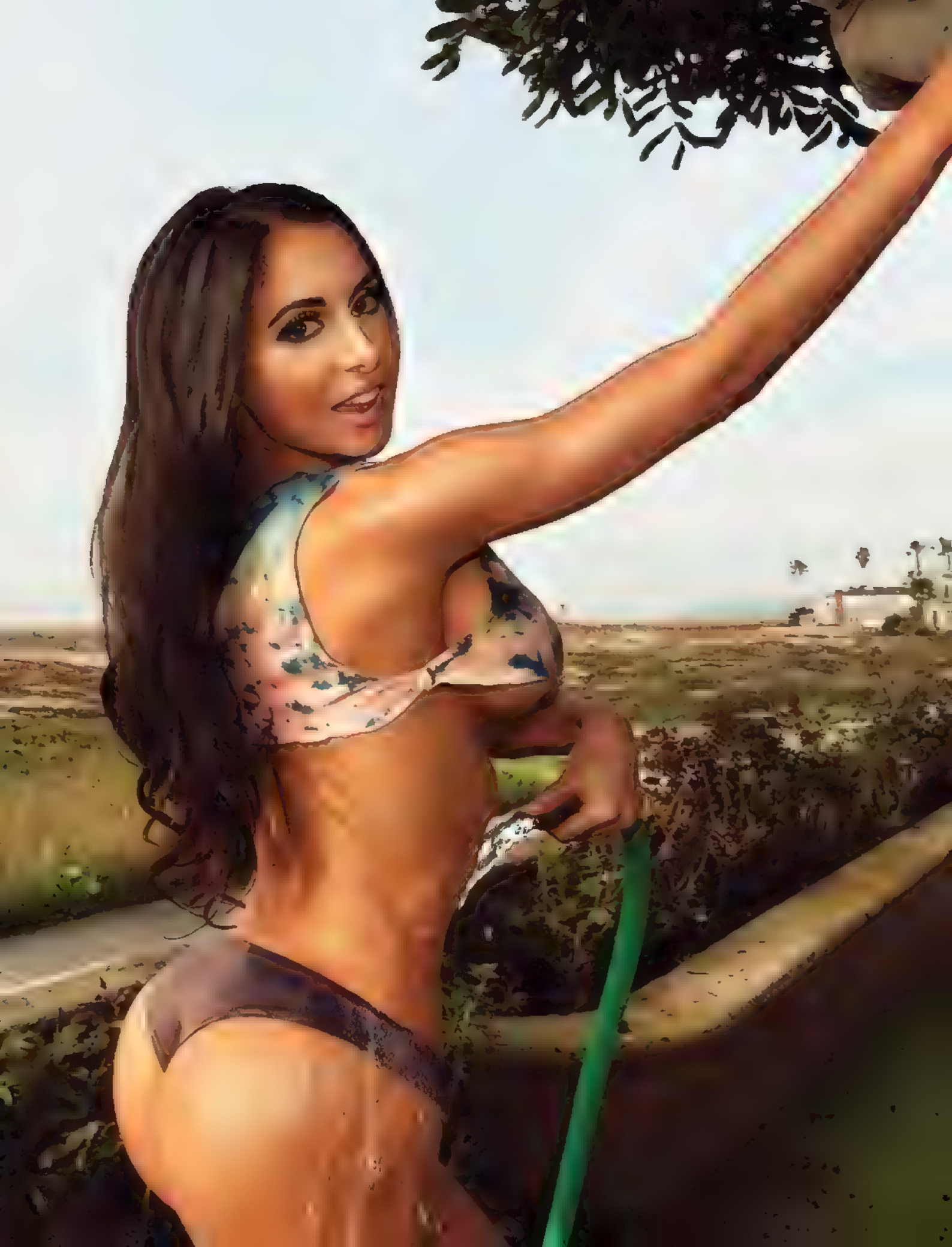
Currently Ashlyn travels back and forth from Cabo to Vegas for work, where she works as a vibrant scintillating model, glamour caddy and ambiance master. During the day she can be found working a convention drawing attention to the booth, enhancing the client experience while encouraging more traffic and sales. It is common for her to work with international organisations for example Ashlyn recently added Canadian company, NV Inc to her clientele as spokes model for their inauguration in the American marketplace which is scheduled for August 2017.

One might encounter Ashlyn on the golf course educating golfers on how to play a hole providing both the aggressive line and the strategic play. She will help in filling in divots, making club selection, marking balls and repairing ball marks. If luck is on your side you will encounter her serving mouth watering drinks at the hottest pool venues in Vegas or playing a sexy video starlet. Her provocative sex appeal combined with spunky witty personality has made her an ideal asset for atmosphere gigs. During the late evening you may spot her in a G-string and pasties in a tub full of rose pedals or lounging around in lingerie creating an unforgettable experience for partygoers. It would be no big surprise to sit beside her on your next flight as she is a known jet-setter following her lust for travel and adventure.

The June 2017 edition of Maxim Africa was the venue for yet an additional opportunity for Ashlyn aficionados to enjoy her sparkle.
September 2016 Ashlyn was a Nevada finalist placing third in the Miss JetSet Magazine contest to raise money for childhood cancer. Sports Illustrated featured Ashlyn Memorial Day Weekend 2016 with the prestigious honour as "The Lovely Lady of the Day". The year 2014 again brought Ashlyn international exposure as she was named Miss Kite Spain which had followed close on the heels of a previous international engagement that occurred in August 2013 where she was featured in a six page photo spread for FHM Magazine Turkey.

Some of her commercial projects include Cannery Resort, ESPN, Hardbat and two Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority commercials for *'What Happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas'* and *Only in Vegas'*. She has also achieved principle roles for Boost Mobile, a speaking role for Miracle Image and the principal role in Benny Benassi and Gary Go hit *Cinema*. Her ability to successfully create a high quality image has allowed her to work with companies such as Hersey's, Express Clothing, Verizon Wireless, Crest, Trefly's, Playstation, Transact, Mason Medical, Best Humidors along with many others.

Her outgoing personality has made her a desirable component for atmosphere roles in major nightclubs like PURE, LAX, Lavo, Encore Beach Club, Surrender and most widely known for Tao, becoming a main attraction and appearing weekly in 2009 to 2011. Her industry knowledge, professionalism, motivation and diversity resulted in working for some of the best pool parties in Vegas like Encore Beach Club and Rehab. Also becoming the #1 rebooked Caddy with Platinum Tees in 2009 and 2010.
She is pro-active in the industry and continues to pursue new opportunities and experiences.



Travels with Tom

I recently moved from San Francisco to Kansas City, and after the presidential election I realized, hey, what better way to get to know my new neighbors than by doing a voter registration drive?

"Most politicians are men. Men are liars. You got a petition to end lying?"

"Mama! It's Pop on the phone!"

"Tell him I'm not here."

Janet showed me that pragmatism is alive and well.

"Get the fuck off my property!"

I had an exhilarating discussion with Carl about gun policy.

"The real question is, what BBQ sauce goes best on a liberal canvasser?"

"Humans should all get chipped. That'd make registration so much easier."

"I always knew you were a fascist, Fifi."

"I voted for Obama, but that was in Tampa.... Can you hold onto this, please? I'm not sure I updated my info.... Hold onto this too, son. Anyway, I'll register online. Don't want to inconvenience you."

Troy was heavily involved in fixing a broken system.

Meanwhile, Yvonne enjoyed getting into the weeds with me on various issues.

"Huh?"

"It's very brave of you to go door-to-door in such a red district...."

And Suzanne taught me a thing or two about alternative facts.

SLAM!

ALTERNATIVE FACT

SLAM!

FACT

During lunch I daydreamed about what my friends back in the Bay Area would think of my new home....
"How far is Kansas from Colorado? Weed is totally legal in Colorado."
"Dude, it's like I've been saying: The difference between conservatives and liberals is empathy. We care about people —watch your step— and they don't."
"Wait—you moved?"
"Voter registration is just a start. Next you need to make people sign pledges for clean energy, women's rights, nuclear disarmament, amnesty for illegal immigrants, refugee resettlement, an independent prosecutor, single-payer health care, affordable child care, universal pre-K education, access to healthy food choices, a ban on ivory imports, reforestation of the Amazon jungle, divestment from Trump businesses, LGBTQ rights..."

"Hey! Clean up this mess before we ticket you for littering."
"Whoops...I guess the squirrels in Kansas are tricky little fellas."
"VOTER FRAUD!"
I SET OFF ONCE AGAIN, EAGER TO REGISTER AS MANY FOLKS AS POSSIBLE.
SCRAM!
NOPE
NEH
UH-UH
FUH-GET-TYE
SHOO
OUT
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
It rhymes with "Duck Scoff"
GIT!
IT'S LOADED
GET A REAL JOB
(I am aware of the irony of that statement)
Finally I returned to the district HQ, my feet sore, my back achy and yet my spirit refreshed by so many fascinating encounters.
"Um...there's nothing here except scribbles and paw prints."
"But the people I met will be inscribed on my heart forever!"

Tia
McDonald
JOEY WRIGHT
NOVA PRIME PI
JULY 2012

Tell our readers a little bit about yourself
I'm a globe trotting runway walking beach loving gal who just can't resist an adventure. I was previously Miss Florida and I've raised more than 150 000 USD and 5 cars for families in need. Because of that I was awarded the President's Gold Silver and Bronze Service Award, Governor's Point of Light Honor, Proclamation from the Mayor of New Smyrna Beach USA.

What would you say is one of the most significant points in your career?
My first job at 16 was working the 24 hours of Le Mans in France as their official race girl and that opened up doors for me leading to me working races and shoots around the world. I've since traveled to Canada the Virgin Islands England Spain Italy Greece, Japan China Thailand Australia, and more. Some of my favourite events were attending the Cannes Film Festival and walking in New York Fashion Week last year.

Worst job you had before modelling?
I thought I was going to be in a Geico insurance commercial while I was at the University of Florida but I'm misunderstood and I ended up being a lizard mascot at a football game and had to wear a bulky outfit in swampy heat. I had about 20 students who drunkenly grabbed or sat on my tail and tried to rip my head off.

How would you describe yourself in 5 words?
Determined loyal trustworthy happy and loving.

Do you have any hidden talents?
I sang opera at Disney World with a choir backing me.

Where do you see yourself in five years?
Possibly on Maxim's Hot 100 list. I've attended their event every year and it's been a personal goal of mine for as long as I can remember.

When do you feel sexy?
On the runway. I was previously Miss Florida and placed at Miss USA and I can truly say I always feel my best when I'm on the catwalk (Meow^_^).

What is your favourite city in the world and why?
Sydney Australia. I was there for 3 months for a study and while there, I traveled from Melbourne to The Great Barrier Reef. I learned about reef preservation and was humbled to experience its natural wonder and rich sea life.

How do you relax? I'm all about meditation and breathing in the salty beach air.

Name someone (alive) you would really like to meet (and why?) Winnie Harlow. She's not only one of the world's most high profile models but she's proved that your differences are what make you beautiful and that you can be successful no matter where you come from.

What are 3 things you can't live without?
My momma, my cell phone and my pho soup.

Are you involved in any special projects or charities?
Community service hasn't been just a hobby, but a commitment that I have to people who can't speak for themselves, and I'm so grateful and proud to be able to contribute to causes I care about. I started a pageant for special needs children called Our Shining Stars Pageant along with a cheer team for underprivileged girls that won 1st place at state after only 2 weeks of forming. I started Our Shining Stars when I was 10 years old and it's still going strong. Each year we have about 60 contestants, and every contestant wins a crown and a huge bag of gifts. My sibling is autistic and there wasn't any pageant available for people who are mentally or physically challenged. To date there are now more than 20 special needs pageants up and running around the US.

What is the first thing you notice about a guy?
His eyes. They are the windows to the soul.

What would an immediate turn-off be?
Snaggleteeth and over confidence.

How far would you go on a first date?
I personally would rather get to know someone before getting physical but if we really hit it off, I can't help but have a little evening kiss. I do love to cuddle though.

What would you consider dirty-talk?
Less words, more action. I have my trigger words, but why ruin the mystery?

What is the weirdest thing you have ever found attractive in a guy?
I love nerds. There's something about those brains. And there's nothing better than talking tech.

What does a man have to do to impress you/win you over?
Pick my brain about the universe and things that are meaningful to me.

What is the funniest pickup line a guy has used on you?
You have pretty eyeballs. I didn't know that was even a thing but it made me giggle so points for effort.

Tell us one of your worst or uncomfortable date stories
A guy came over to pick me up and I had a picture of my brother who passed away up on my wall (the guy probably assumed it was a picture of my ex). He asked me who the ugly guy in the picture was. (my brother was a model on Dawson's Creek). That ended the date REAL quick.

Have you ever been hit on by a woman?
Yes, a few times. I must say it's super flattering, but I just love men too much.

What was your first kiss like?
It was a dare. Super wet and sloppy. I think I waited like five years before kissing a guy again.

What was it like shooting on location?
It was an absolute dream. The views were surreal, the food even better. I enjoyed myself so much that I had to pinch myself a few times to make sure it was happening for real. I grew up having other kids make fun of me for not being pretty enough so I would say the little Tia would be very happy.

How was it shooting with your photographer?
I couldn't help but have so many moments of gratitude. The entire team is so talented at what they do and you can truly see their passion turn to art.

How did you feel while shooting?
Empowered. I grew up on the beach, and surfed a lot so I'm most comfortable in my bikini.

Anything interesting or notable happen that we should know about?
Aside from almost falling off a 200-foot balcony onto a bunch of cactuses, all went extremely well. Santorini is known for extreme winds, and there's actually a lot of photos of the wind picking me up, along with my 20-foot long dress which opened up like a parachute.

Hometown:
Daytona Beach, Florida USA

Current Residence:
San Diego, California

Current Job:
Co-founder of @SkinnyFit Detox Tea, and a supportive voice to more than 30 million people trying to live a healthier lifestyle.

Heritage/Ethnicity:
Native American, French and Danish. Nickname? T-Bird – I fly around the world.

Fears?
I have a huge fear of monkeys! Although I love animals, I recently went to Thailand where there was an island full of them, and their giant red eyes terrified me! It didn't help that they were attacking people for their cellphones and food! I mean, who do they need to text?

Life motto?
Shoot for the moon, if you miss, you'll land among the stars.

What's some good advice?
Don't let your struggle become your identity.

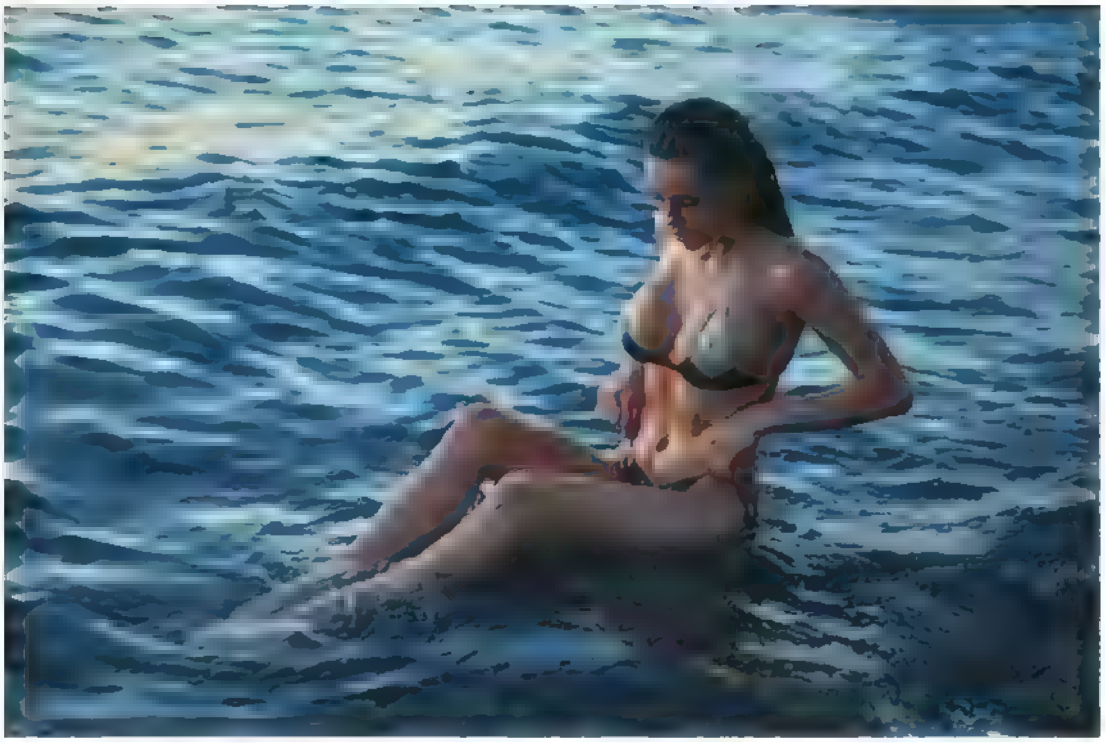
Your Favourite Car?
1967 Shelby GT 500 Mustang!

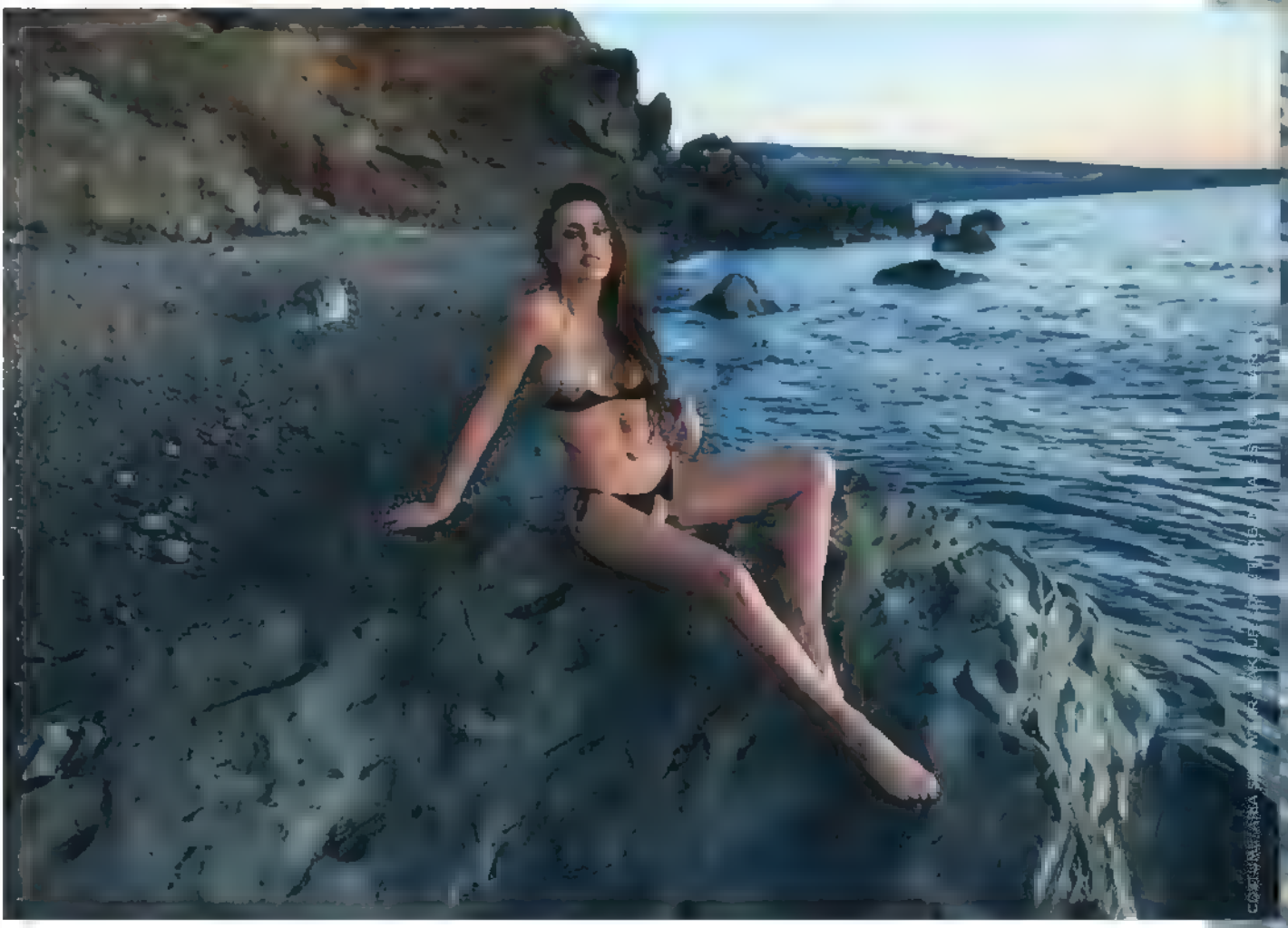
What is sexy to you?
Being confident in your own skin and intelligence.

Favourite TV Show?
Shark Tank and I'm always excited for Miss Universe.

Favourite Movie?
Forrest Gump, classics never get old.

Current book you're reading? 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.





ARE YOU EXPERIENCED

Testing out the fledgling US Airbnb Experiences, our writer takes an inebriated tour of Detroit with a former guitarist for Kid Rock and a gaggle of new friends (including one lizard man)

By ERIC SPITZNAGEL

"No shit? You're Kid Rock's guitarist?"

Kenny Olson smiles at the two 20-something male tourists from Pittsburgh, both of whom seem genuinely starstruck.

"Used to be", Olson says in a raspy baritone. "I'm doing other stuff now. Got a gig tonight." He gestures toward a poster on the wall behind him, which features a picture of Olson himself wailing on a guitar.

The tourists lean in for a closer look. "Kenny Olson and Friends", one of them reads aloud from the poster. They turn to look at me and my small assortment of new friends hovering near Olson. The majority of us are dressed in black leather, all of it way too tight for healthy circulation. Also, one of us is wearing a lizard mask.

"These your friends?" the tourists ask Olson.

"Fuck yeah", Blind Bob shouts back. Blind Bob — his nickname isn't hyperbole, he's actually blind — is the one in a lizard mask, which makes his declaration especially ominous.

"You guys in a band?" they ask.

We laugh, but nobody answers. Because technically, no, we're not. We're just Olson's entourage, or at least we are today. What's more, we paid for those bragging rights. We've signed up for Motor City Rocks, a new Airbnb "Experience" that offers a different kind of vacation. For R4 900 a head, we get to drive around Detroit in a limo, get day-drunk and listen to a guy who used to tour with Kid Rock tell stories about rock excess and that time Florence Henderson grabbed his ass backstage.

Olson has had an impressive music career for a relatively unknown axman. He was Kid Rock's lead guitarist for 11 years, providing riffs and blistering solos for such hits as "Bawitdaba", "Cowboy" and "Only God Knows Why". He quit recording and touring with Rock in the mid-2000s — "The reasons are complicated", Olson says — but he hasn't been hurting for opportunities. He's played with the likes of Metallica, Sheryl Crow and Snoop Dogg. Keith Richards once called him "one of the best rock guitarists on the scene right now".

We're outside Third Man Records, the vinyl shop and recording studio of Detroit native Jack White. Olson doesn't know White personally, but "the store is pretty badass", he assures us. It's the latest stop on a citywide tour that has been meandering at best. So far, we've seen the Motown museum, Saint Andrew's Hall (where Eminem got his first break) and the Majestic club. Olson has played at every venue except Motown, but his ex–father-in-law was one of the Temptations.

Skip Franklin, Olson's manager, inserts himself between us and the Pittsburgh admirers, ushering us back toward the limo. "Come on, guys, let's keep it moving!" he barks at us. "We're on a schedule here." This is not entirely true. Other than driving around looking for music landmarks, we don't really have anyplace to be until sound check at seven PM. But we happily play along with the ruse, because there's something thrilling about having a big, burly rock manager, with a face that looks like it's not unaccustomed to receiving punches, treat you like somebody too important to talk to civilians.

Back in the limo, Olson unfurls another rock tale — something about debating the many variations on the peanut-butter-and-jam sandwich with Michael Jackson. Olson is easy to like. He's scraggy and disheveled, with a paunch and a big grin that peeks out of a gray goatee. He zigzags between topics randomly, following no apparent logic. One minute he's explaining why that Journey song "Don't Stop Believin'" sucks because there's no such thing as "South Detroit." Then, apropos of nothing, he's telling us about the time Joe C, Kid Rock's three-foot-nine sidekick, tried to beat up Gary Coleman during the video shoot for "Cowboy".

This is his first full-fledged Motor City Rocks outing for Airbnb. The first few were just "test runs", he says. "They were mostly friends coming in from out of town. We'd just drive around and laugh." Which isn't all that different from what we're doing now. But the customer base has definitely expanded. Our group includes Blind Bob, a New Yorker by way of South Carolina who lost his eyesight in an "explosion" (the details are sketchy) and rebuilds car engines for a living (the details of how he does that without the gift of sight are also sketchy) but whose real passion is drumming. Blind Bob — he hands everyone a business card that reads BLIND BOB THE LIZZARD MAN — met Olson during a recent rock-and-roll fantasy camp in Hollywood and decided he needed to make the pilgrimage to Detroit.

There's also Frank Faisst, a German corporate exec who deejays and shoots music videos on the side, barely speaks English and is dressed as though he's heading to an S&M dungeon. He's here with Dacia Bridges, a Michigan native who has spent the past two decades in Germany, working on her dance and electronica singing career. Rounding out our travelling party is Bella Bond, a small-framed brunette with enormous fake breasts — she shared this info with me moments after we met — that are barely contained by a skimpy leather halter top. She travelled here from West Palm Beach, Florida, where she works as a model (mostly for biker conventions) and has a doctorate in pharmacy. Oh, and she has minor brain damage.

"I got hit by two trucks, in the head", she tells me. "I was driving, and they smooshed my car. The front was fine, but the trunk was pushed up into the passenger's seat. Whatever cut my head was in my trunk. I don't remember. I had amnesia."

"Wow", I respond, not sure what else to say. "I'm glad you're okay."

"The doctor said I'm not at full mental capacity", she tells me. "So, if I forget your name, I'm sorry. I'm not all there."

"I think the best kind of travel is when you become a new person."

It might be the drugs talking — when somebody pulled out a joint, I didn't say no — but this is hands-down the most entertaining vacation I've taken in years. And I say that as somebody who never much cared for Kid Rock, or white-boy rap-rock in general. I'm not even all that impressed with the Detroit music scene. I love Iggy Pop and Motown but not enough to fill my phone with photos of the empty stages where they once performed.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RYAN LOWRY

Left: Kenny Olson (standing third from left) and the patrons of his Motor City Rocks Experience **Right**: Olson onstage with the Scorpio Brothers

There's nothing about this tour that's nearly as exclusive or "underground" as promised. Get yourself a flask and a GPS and you could easily re-create it. But you'd be missing the point. Like that old saying goes, it's not about the destination, it's about taking the journey with a blind drummer, a German in tight leather and a guy who used to perform in front of thousands with a little person.

We pull up to the Fox Theatre, where Olson has arranged for an all-access backstage tour. We're joined by a few others, most of them musicians performing tonight with Olson. Tino Gross, a local bluesman who looks like a character from a Tom Waits song — he's a skinny white guy in a fedora and black sunglasses with a voice that sounds like he smoked a pack of cigarettes before breakfast — tells me he performed in this very theatre with Bob Dylan.

"I was in the lobby before the show", he explains, "and Bob's manager, Mitch, runs up to me and says, 'Bob wants you to play tonight.' He took me backstage and pointed to a Marshall amp. He told me, 'When Bob looks at you, take a solo. And then when he looks at you again, stop.' That was the only thing I knew going in."

We all nod in quiet reverence, sitting in the dark and staring at the stage that has seen so much history. Even Olson is at a loss for words. But then Blind Bob breaks the silence. "Are we done here?" he shouts, scooping his seeing-eye dog, Buddy, off the ground. "It's drink-30. Let's do some fucking shots!"

We all laugh. Classic Bob move!

• • •

Last November, Airbnb co-founder and CEO Brian Chesky unveiled the company's new Experiences program to an audience at LA's Orpheum Theatre. In his speech, he recalled pleading with his parents as a child to take a family trip to "the most magical place on earth, the North Pole." Their vacations rarely got more ambitious than an Anheuser-Busch factory tour, and his lingering disappointment helped inspire Experiences, which Chesky promised would make vacations "magical" again. How do you do that? By using the "hero's journey" narrative structure coined by mythologist Joseph Campbell.

"A character starts in their ordinary world", Chesky explained. "They cross the threshold — think Wizard of Oz — to this new magical world, where they meet people... They have a moment of transformation, and they return to the ordinary world."

You couldn't ask for a better summation.

Some of the Experiences sound like they were created with Mad Libs.

of Airbnb Experiences — created by a guy who's still pissed off that his parents never took him to Santa's Village and founded on the same creative philosophy that helped George Lucas come up with Star Wars.

Airbnb currently offers about 800 Experiences in 20 international cities, with plans to expand to more than 50 by the end of this year. An Airbnb spokesperson says that roughly 34 000 people have started the process of creating an Experience.

Many of the existing excursions cover well-trodden territory, like drinking and eating. But since the program's launch, the Experiences have gotten uniquely weird. You can pay to ride around London on a penny farthing bicycle, or do yoga with a Barcelona model, or make plastic food in Tokyo, or visit Nelson Mandela's prison with his former prison guard (included: "a meal in prison"). For R8k (excl travel) you can spend the night with an actual wolf pack, which includes a long hike into the mountains of Los Angeles, sleeping under the stars next to creatures that could ostensibly eat you, and s'mores. Some of the Experiences sound like they were created with Mad Libs: Come feed homeless people in Capetown,, with a local DJ. Learn how to make your own lamp... while drinking margaritas. Take a walking tour of historic London sites... while learning how to play the ukulele.

"They're creating an industry that doesn't exist", says Brad Stone, author of *The Upstarts: How Uber, Airbnb and the Killer Companies of the New Silicon Valley Are Changing the World*, "which is harder than it looks. But they're trying to cater to a millennial mindset, which is 'Don't sell me some cookie-cutter thing. Give me something I haven't seen before.' But that's hugely challenging, because you're trying to sell people things that maybe they don't even know they want."

The common denominator for all Experiences, the thing they all offer without explicitly stating it, is temporary friendship. A Paris Experience, billed as an "Urban soccer challenge", is a pickup soccer game, followed by a drink at a bar with your new friends — all for just R450. You can eat tapas in Barcelona with "foodies" (i.e. people who like food), or go vinyl-record shopping with a guy in Osaka, or "meet cool people" at a party in Paris, or have a picnic with a stranger in San Francisco. For R1200, Amanda in Los Angeles will drive around the city with you and eat tacos. You pay for your own tacos, but she'll show you where she likes to eat tacos, and then the two of you can eat tacos together.

Courtney Nichols, a self-described "purveyor of kitsch", sells an Experience that's essentially drinking with her and her friends for an evening. On her Airbnb ad she promises to take you to "bizarro landmarks" and hang out with her "martini-guzzling . outlandish entourage" at "invite-only dance marathons". Nichols tells us that her R4k Experience is about "meeting my social circle. I surround myself with a group of bohemian eccentrics. A lot of drag queens are in my social circle. A lot of artists. A lot of people who are just quirky." Customer reviews tell a different story. Airbnb users who tried the Nichols Experience have been less than satisfied, with one complaining on the website that "she took us to her friends' apartment, where we sat around for another hour waiting for them to get booze." Another claims they "expected to go out to a few LA bars and dance, instead we spent most of the night at her home and a friend's apartment", and they "left the experience feeling confused."

It's possible some of the Experience hosts have loneliness issues of their own. For R320, a young couple will take you up to the Hollywood sign and explain their complicated reasons for moving to LA. There's a R1 100 tour of the Louvre in Paris that's advertised as "Meet the funniest guy in the museum", which is nothing if not a cry for help. If you're in Florence and your idea of a good time is "walking at night in silence", there's an Airbnb host willing to charge you R1 000 for the opportunity. (Don't worry; the host provides a "small flashlight", so it won't be weird or anything.)

Chris Wren, a software engineer for Airbnb, is both an Experience host and an enthusiastic Experience customer. For him, the platform has never been about feeling less alone. "You can meet new friends, but it's not really about that", he says. "I think the best kind of travel is when you become a new person, when you take it beyond the shallow touristy thing and embrace the fantasy of it."

How far could that fantasy be taken? It's not that big a leap from "Let's play soccer" to "Let's have a masked orgy". I asked the Airbnb reps if they would accept Experience proposals that were sexual in nature — maybe not so far as soliciting prostitution but at least involving nudity and adult behaviour — and they directed us to the "quality standards" web page for prospective Experience hosts. It doesn't mention sexual content. The company's main concern is that hosts craft a compelling three-act fantasy. "Consider the beginning, middle and end", the Airbnb site advises. "How will you greet guests when they arrive? What is the main activity they'll do with you? How will you draw the experience to a close?"

Kerri Aultman, a fetish model in Miami, hopes to be one of the first to take the Experiences in a bold new direction. She's currently overhauling a loft space for maximum kink possibilities. There will be a stripper pole and a mirror ball and a "costume room" full of wigs, slutty costumes and fetish gear for experienced and newbie clients alike. Her Experience, she says, is designed to be only for women who want to spend a day and a night exploring their kinky sides.

"I live in a fantasy world all the time", she says of her day job. "I want to create an Experience where people can try that for themselves. They can put on some wigs and fishnets, find a new sexual identity, see what it feels like. We'll go out on the town in costumes and then come back and have a slumber party."

So basically what Chesky and Joseph Campbell had in mind, but this hero's journey ends with pillow fights and a stripper pole.

• • •

Now we're at a fancy restaurant — music venue in suburban Detroit. It's just like the rock clubs on 8 Mile Road but with more white people and a menu that includes duck cotechino. Olson and friends are performing here tonight, and the backstage lounge is packed with a dozen or so musicians, friends and pay-to-play "friends". Actually, the backstage is just a small room off the restaurant's kitchen, with a few couches that smell like sweaty leather, pizza slices balanced on every available surface and a big tub of canned beers on ice.

A stern-looking woman bursts into the room from the kitchen. "Guys, please", she says. "There is absolutely no smoking weed in here!"

Nobody says a word. We just pretend we have no idea what she's talking about. Because obviously, none of us were smoking weed. What gave her that idea? That thick cloud of blue smoke hanging in the air must've come from someone else.

I return to my conversation with Joe Sax, the lead singer and bassist of Olson's new trio, the Scorpio Brothers. Sax is dressed all in black, with long black hair and black sunglasses that never leave his face. He could just as easily be a cat burglar.

"I told Kenny, 'I've listened to your stuff, and a lot of it is "Oh, I'm fucking high on cocaine, I'm drinking too much, I want some pussy", all this shit'", he tells me. "I've already done that. If we're going to do this, you have to let me sing about shit that matters to me. The working title for one of our songs is 'Changing Minds'. The chorus is 'Changing the world is changing minds, this is the world we leave behind.' Because you gotta care about what we're leaving behind, right?"

As it's happening, it feels like the greatest conversation I've ever had with another human being. But I know it's all about context. Change a few circumstances, and I'd probably want to kill myself. But sitting backstage before a show, where the beer and pizza are free, people keep handing me joints and Olson's manager keeps checking on me — *You need anything? A plate of mussels, a bourbon cocktail, a foot rub, a new pair of pants?* — I feel special.

I've learned a lot about Detroit today. Maybe not a version that most tourists get, but a more intimate one. I've learned there's a catwalk above the Fox Theatre that nobody is allowed to use, but Olson and Dweezil Zappa snuck up there once. I learned that the club where Jack White punched a guy in the face has a great deal on mid-afternoon shots. I learned that the mansion of Motown founder Berry Gordy is for sale, for a mere $1.6 million, and Olson is thinking about buying it. I learned that Hot Tamales is the only strip club in Detroit that doesn't charge a cover. I learned quite a few things about strippers, in fact.

Franklin interrupts a scintillating conversation about the strippers of Flint to let us know it's time for sound check. Olson and the band head to the stage, and I take this opportunity to talk to my other Experience cohorts. Why exactly are they here?

"Some places have dinner packages with the stars, where you can meet them before or after the show and have a drink, but this is different", says Dacia Bridges. "It's more authentic. You don't feel like a fan getting a meet-and-greet. You're just hanging out."

Nobody in our group is under the illusion that this might be their ticket to a music career. They don't expect to be discovered or given a record contract if they just impress Olson enough. "I don't have any musical talent", Bella Bond tells me. "I just like being around these guys, feeling like I belong here." Most of them are happy with their non-rock star lives. Blind Bob has created his own weird universe. He tells me he's heading down to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina tomorrow to be a judge at a beauty contest at a biker bar called Suck Bang Blow.

I wake up with a pounding head and clothes that smell like bad decisions.

"Do I want to ask how you do that?" I say.

Blind Bob chortles sinisterly while petting Buddy, who hasn't left his side all day. "You want my vote, your boobs better be covered in braille."

The show starts late. At least 300 people squeeze into the small space, and they're ready to bob their heads enthusiastically while drinking craft beers. The Scorpio Brothers get started around 11, and it's an aural blitzkrieg. Olson delivers slushy guitar riffs at a volume that makes my genitals vibrate like a speaker's woofer. Bridges jumps onstage to join them for a cover of Hendrix's "Little Wing", belting out the tune with the soul of a seasoned R&B performer. The crowd hollers in approval, and so does the Olson Experience gang, but we do it more meaningfully because we've been partying with her for the past 30 hours. We have a connection that none of these civilians would understand.

When it's over, we stick around as Olson and his bandmates pack up their instruments and pound more drinks and sneak away for joints in the alley and talk about what an awesome gig it was. There's a lot of exchanging of e-mail addresses and phone numbers, and promises that this is the beginning of something, though nobody says what that "something" might be.

"You're stuck with me, Bob", Olson says, giving Blind Bob a lingering hug. "For the long haul. You and me."

"I love you, brother", Bob says, still wearing his lizard mask. "Don't let anybody know, though."

• • •

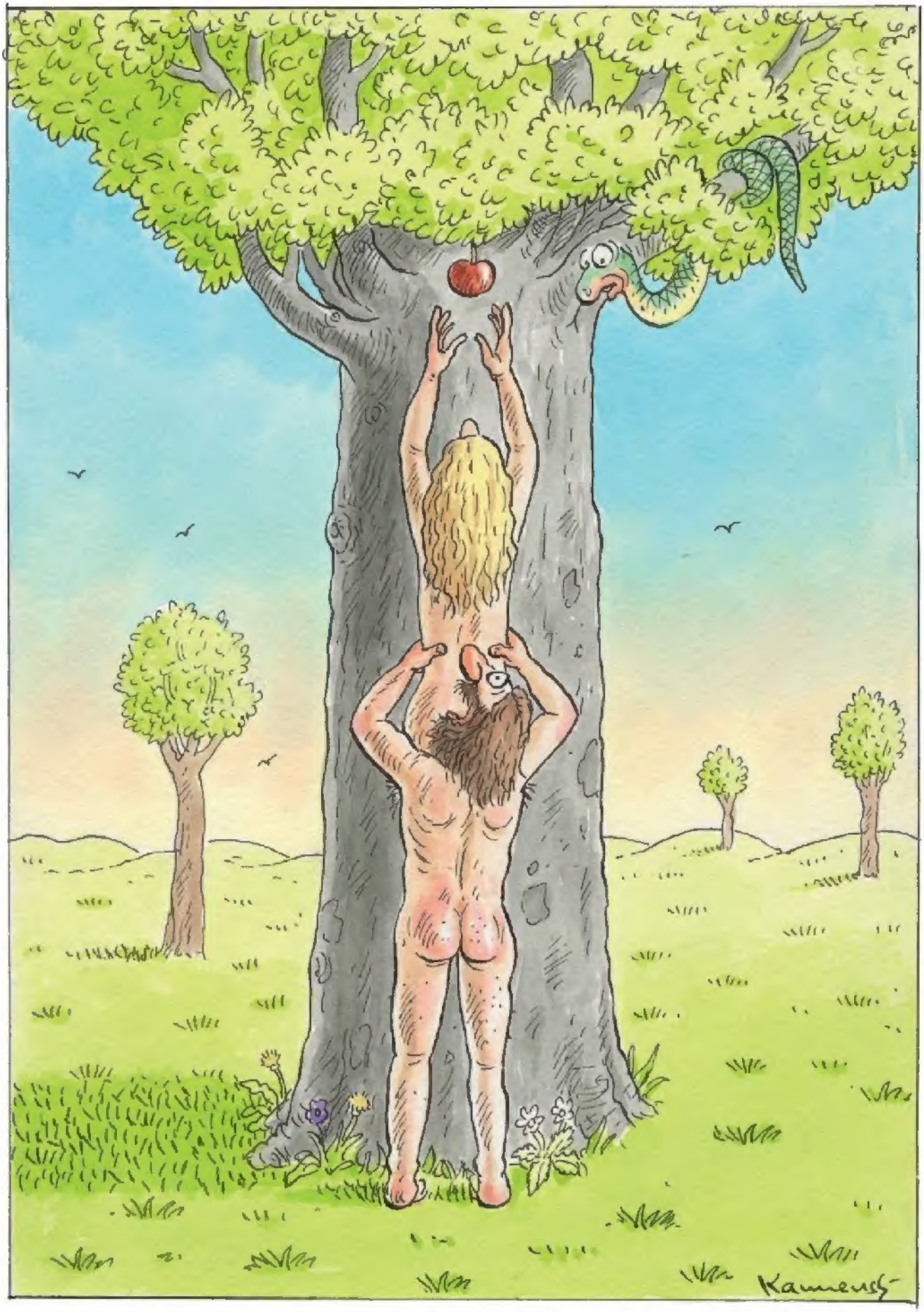
I wake up with ringing ears and a pounding head and clothes that smell like bad decisions. I have no idea how I made it back to my hotel room. My phone is yelling at me, and I see I've gotten a text from Olson. "Thank you for all your support my soul brother", it reads, followed by several rock horn emojis.

I stare at my phone for a long time, not sure what to think. Are we pals now? Can I legitimately say, "Me and Kid Rock's guitarist are soul brothers?" I guess that's cool, but I was hoping for something a little more profound. Chesky had promised a hero's journey. Where was my "moment of transformation?" Had I learned about myself through this experience?

Well, I guess I learned I can smoke rock-star weed and still have coherent conversations. I learned that my rock-and-roll dreams from childhood haven't gone away, as just standing behind the velvet rope at the side of the stage during a concert gave me goose bumps. I came to this Experience with a sneering adult cynicism, but by the end of the night I was flashing rock horns unironically. I was a kid again, pretending to be an adult, or at least my kid fantasy of what being an adult would be like.

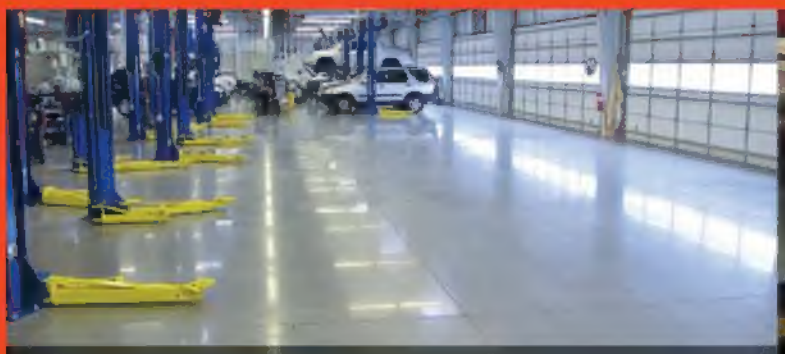
It would fade eventually, like all fantasies. We sober up and the vacations end and we get back to the real world. But while it lasted, it was beautiful.

I crawl out of bed to look for my pants. They are nowhere to be found. For a split second, I think about texting Franklin. He'll know what to do. ■



"That's not a branch you're standing on, Eve...!

FLOOR TECH



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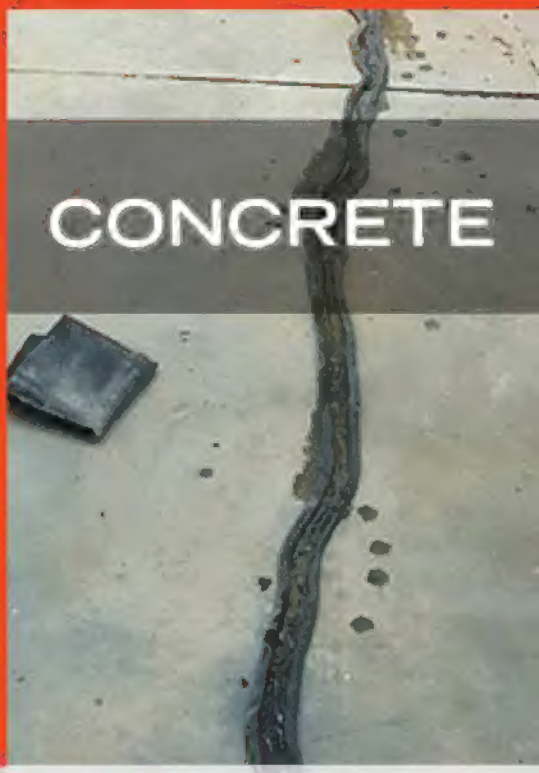

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